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SHELTON SWEEPS FONSECA TO REACH ANOTHER MONTREAL QUARTERFINAL

IN BRIEF

HM’S GREETINGS TO PRESIDENT OF CHAD

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Mahamat Idriss Deby, President of the Transitional Military Council of the Republic of Chad, on his country’s National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to Chad for continued security and stability, as well as the achievement of growth and prosperity.

SALALAH NAMED AS ‘REGIONAL RESILIENCE HUB’



The city has also been designated as a Healthy City.

The city of Salalah has been designated as a Regional Resilience Hub by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). The city has also been designated as a Healthy City. A celebration was held to mark the achievements under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, in presence of Shaikh Dr Said bin Humaid al Harthy, Wali of Salalah, on Monday. The two achievements reflect the city’s progress in enhancing quality of life and sustainability. They are the fruit of the integrated efforts aimed at building a healthier, safer city, better equipped to handle various future challenges. **DETAILS ON P3**

MAJOR QUAKE ROCKS COLOMBIA, NEIGHBOURS

A powerful earthquake rocked Colombia and neighbouring Latin American countries on Monday, with at least 18 people confirmed dead in first reports as shocked residents surveyed destroyed buildings. Emergency teams rushed to help victims and search for survivors in the rubble after geologists recorded the quake at a magnitude of 7.4 with an epicentre 100 km deep in the west of the country. The early-morning quake was also felt in Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela - itself hit by a devastating quake in late June - and prompted building evacuations in the Colombian capital Bogota. **DETAILS ON P7**

HM, Japanese PM discuss regional situation

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a telephone call on Monday from Sanae Takaichi, Prime Minister of Japan. At the outset of the call, the Prime Minister conveyed the greetings of Emperor Naruhito of Japan to His Majesty the Sultan, along with best wishes of good health and well-being to His Majesty. The Emperor also wished the Omani people further progress and development. His Majesty the Sultan asked the Prime Minister to convey his greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to Emperor Naruhito. His Majesty also wished the friendly Japanese people further prosperity and growth.



During the call, the two sides reviewed the strong bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Japan, and explored avenues to further support and develop them across various domains, in a manner that serves the mutual interests of the two countries and their friendly peoples. The two sides also exchanged views on regional developments. The Japanese Prime Minister expressed her appreciation for the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts in supporting dialogue and de-escalation pathways, as well as in strengthening regional and international security and stability. — ONA

OMAN STEPS UP EFFORTS TO CONTAIN OIL SPILL

E A S A Y S S L I C K I S M E A S U R I N G A P P R O X I M A T E L Y 3 9 0 S Q U A R E K M

THE Environment Authority, in close coordination with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and other relevant national stakeholders, is continuing its comprehensive response to the grounding of the vessel Caroline Bezengi off the Hallaniyat Islands in Dhofar Governorate. The operation is being executed through an integrated national framework that combines technical spill remediation, vessel securing, and ongoing environmental monitoring, surveillance, and impact assessment, with the overarching objectives of mitigating incident-related risks, safeguarding the marine ecosystem, and ensuring the safety of maritime navigation. The Environment Authority has confirmed that it is overseeing the incident through a fully integrated environmental monitoring, surveillance, and assessment system, involving specialised national technical teams and leveraging state-of-the-art surveillance



A satellite image shows the vessel Caroline Bezengi appeared to be covered in a coat of algae, off the Hallaniyat Islands.

technologies, satellite imagery, environmental modelling, and field surveys. These tools are being utilised to conduct continuous environmental evaluations, track the trajectory and spread of oil pollution, and identify priority zones for response and protective measures.

The authority further emphasised that the environmental response strategy is grounded in up-to-date scientific and technical data, alongside real-time monitoring results, while maintaining an ongoing assessment of potential risks to the marine environment, coastal

areas, and ecologically sensitive habitats. According to the latest monitoring and technical analyses, including high-resolution satellite image interpretation, oil pollution persists in the maritime area associated with the incident. **TURN TO P2**

World awaits total solar eclipse on Wednesday

MUSCAT: The world is eagerly anticipating the total solar eclipse on Wednesday, one of the most significant astronomical events of the year. The Moon’s shadow will trace a narrow path across parts of the Northern Hemisphere, while vast regions will witness a partial eclipse. The phenomenon will not be visible from the Sultanate of Oman. Wisal al Hinai, Head of the Community Communication Committee at Oman Astronomical Society, explained that a solar

eclipse occurs when the Moon positions itself between the Earth and the Sun during the new Moon phase, aligning the three celestial bodies in a manner that allows the Moon’s shadow to fall upon the Earth’s surface. She said that an eclipse does not occur with every monthly new Moon due to the approximately five-degree inclination of the Moon’s orbital plane around the Earth relative to the Earth’s orbital plane around the Sun. She said that astronomical



A person tries eclipse-viewing glasses in Madrid’s Planetarium store as the city counts down to the solar eclipse on Wednesday. — Reuters

calculations indicate the path commences over northern regions of Russia, traversing the Arctic Ocean, Greenland, Iceland, and the Atlantic Ocean, before reaching northern Spain, a small portion of northern Portugal, and the Balearic Islands. The partial eclipse zone will extend across most of Europe, parts of North America, and northwestern Africa. Spain will experience a particularly distinctive viewing spectacle, as the eclipse will

occur during the evening hours shortly before sunset, with the Sun positioned low above the horizon throughout its phases. In some areas, the Sun may set while still partially eclipsed. She highlighted that this eclipse represents an exceptional event for several regions along its path. Iceland, for instance, will witness its first total solar eclipse since 1954, while the Iberian Peninsula will experience a significant astronomical event. — ONA

OMAN

FROM PAGE 1

OMAN STEPS UP EFFORTS TO CONTAIN OIL SPILL

A slick measuring approximately 390 square km has been detected, extending northeastward from the Hallaniyat Islands towards the mainland coast, and at its nearest point, is located roughly 7 km offshore.

The authority noted that continuous monitoring and image analysis reveal the slick is advancing along a consistent trajectory, with its observed extent along that path reaching approximately 449 km.

ASSESSMENT

Current modelling and assessment outputs indicate that the slick is generally drifting in a northeasterly direction, with a projected advance of around 121 km over the next 48 hours, based on prevailing marine and meteorological conditions at the time of model generation. The authority stressed that this constitutes a scientific projection rather than an actual observation, and that environmental models remain subject to revision in response to any fluctuations in wind patterns, ocean currents, and sea-state conditions.

Analytical findings further suggest that the denser concentrations of the pollution may be trending towards the approaches of Ras Madrakah, underscoring the need for sustained, intensive monitoring of marine and coastal zones of high environmental priority. The authority clarified that the detected slick area of approximately 390 square km does not correspond to the volume of oil discharged, but rather reflects the geographic extent over which pollution has been observed in the most recent monitoring cycle.

The authority said that the correlation between slick surface area and actual oil quantity cannot be established directly, as it is contingent upon a range of technical variables, including the thickness of the oil layer, the physicochemical properties of the oil, the degree of natural dispersion, marine current dynamics, wind direction and speed, wave action, and general sea conditions.

SUBJECT TO CHANGE

It was further noted that the slick’s area, configuration, and position are inherently subject to change between successive observations due to ongoing movement, spreading, and natural dispersion processes. Accordingly, the recorded figures are treated as technical snapshots tied to specific observation times, rather than as static or definitive values.

With regard to the persistence and detectability of the pollution, the Environment Authority indicated that current monitoring confirms the continued presence of oil on the sea surface, with ongoing movement, morphological evolution, and dispersion driven by prevailing marine and atmospheric conditions.

Specialised Environment Authority teams remain actively engaged in tracking changes in the slick’s extent, position, and drift direction, comparing successive observations to determine rates of change and dispersion patterns, thereby facilitating timely and evidence-based decision-making. Data is subjected to continuous analysis to ascertain whether observed slicks constitute continuous accumulations or fragmented patches resulting from dispersion and natural breakdown processes.

The Environment Authority reaffirmed its commitment to issuing official updates on the environmental status of the incident as developments warrant, thereby ensuring the dissemination of accurate, verifiable information to the public and media.

It reiterated the importance of relying exclusively on official sources and cautioned against the circulation of unauthorised figures, maps, or estimates.

The authority further underscored that the protection of biological diversity, marine habitats, and environmentally sensitive areas remains a foremost priority in the incident response. Efforts are being directed towards identifying zones most vulnerable to impact and correlating them with pollution drift trajectories, with particular emphasis on areas of high ecological value and sensitivity.

Assessment and monitoring activities encompass a broad spectrum of sensitive marine environments, islands, and habitats, including coral reef systems, turtle nesting grounds, marine ecosystems, and coastal zones of ecological significance. Risk assessments are being continuously refined in line with changes in the pollution’s location, extent, and directional movement.

The Environment Authority stressed the critical importance of distinguishing between empirically observed data and outputs derived from modelling projections or hypothetical scenarios. — **ONA**

GCC-STAT issues indicators to combat drug abuse

MUSCAT: The Arab Gulf Countries’ Statistical Centre (GCC-STAT) has issued a metadata guide for the measurement of performance indicators related to the GCC Strategy for Combating Drugs (2025-2028).

The Centre seeks to provide a unified statistical framework for measuring and monitoring the implementation of the aforementioned strategy.

It focuses on enhancing the accuracy and comparability of data among the GCC states with a view to supporting policymaking and evidence-based decision-making.

Unifying the metadata (descriptive data) for these

indicators aims to build an integrated database on the status quo of drugs in GCC states.

It also helps weigh the impact of preventive, therapeutic and security policies and boost GCC states’ integration and ability to combat this cross-border phenomenon.

It is worth noting that the “Index of Treatment, Rehabilitation and Social Integration Services” measures the percentage of individuals who actually receive treatment, rehabilitation or social integration services.

This index, issued annually, reflects the readiness of health and



The centre seeks to provide a unified framework for monitoring the implementation. — **ONA**

social systems to deal with drug abuse.

To assess the impact of drug abuse on public health, the index

calculates the percentage of deaths resulting from drug abuse through the death rate per 100,000 people. — **ONA**

Perseid meteor shower set to light up Oman’s skies

IDRIS AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

OMAN'S SKIES are set to offer a spectacular celestial display as the annual Perseid meteor shower reaches its peak on Wednesday night, August 12, continuing into the early hours of Thursday.

Active from July 17 to August 24, the Perseids are known for their fast and bright meteors, with up to 80 to 100 meteors an hour potentially visible under ideal conditions. The meteors are fragments of debris from Comet Swift-Tuttle that enter Earth’s atmosphere at speeds of around 72 kilometres per second, appearing to radiate from the direction of the Perseus constellation.

This year’s viewing conditions are expected to be particularly favourable, as the peak coincides with a New Moon. The darker skies will make it easier to spot fainter meteors.

The Oman Society of Astronomy and Space recommends heading outdoors after midnight and choosing locations away from artificial light. In Oman, promising viewing locations include the high-altitude landscapes of Jabal Shams and Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, as well as the open expanses of the Rimal Al Sharqiya.

For the best experience,

This year’s viewing conditions are expected to be particularly favourable, as the peak coincides with a New Moon. The darker skies will make it easier to spot fainter meteors. The celestial event is also providing a boost to Oman’s growing stargazing and astro-tourism activities.



Perseids offer an opportunity to experience one of the year’s most anticipated meteor displays.

skywatchers should choose a location with a clear horizon and minimise exposure to city and resort lighting. Allowing the eyes time to adjust to the darkness and avoiding bright phone screens can also improve visibility.

Those planning to photograph the meteor shower can use a tripod and a phone or camera equipped with a night-photography mode.

The celestial event is also providing a boost to Oman’s growing stargazing and astro-tourism activities. Oman Skywatchers, a local stargazing tour company, is organising a Perseid experience at Jabal Shams on

August 14, featuring an overnight stay, meteor and star observation, telescope sessions and a smartphone astrophotography workshop.

Omani blogger Reem al Harthy has also encouraged skywatchers to seek locations away from city lights to enjoy clearer views of the meteor shower.

For astronomy enthusiasts, the Perseids offer an opportunity to experience one of the year’s most anticipated meteor displays. For Oman’s growing stargazing and tourism sector, the event further highlights the potential of Oman’s dark skies as a unique attraction.

Seminar launches ‘Ejada’ card for incentives system

SALALAH: The Individual and Institutional Ejada Seminar inaugurated the ‘Ejada Card’ for the moral incentives system in the government sector, which is an electronic platform providing a number of benefits to employees of units of the State’s Administrative Apparatus. The event was held as part of the Labour Forum organised by the Ministry of Labour in Dhofar Governorate.

The inauguration was held under the auspices of Said bin Abdullah al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development, with the participation of several government entities and specialists in human resources and institutional excellence, aiming to promote a culture of excellence and enhance performance in the government sector.

Mohammed bin Mubarak al Kalbani, Director-General of Development and Quality



The project includes a modern electronic system that provides benefits and services to employees. — **ONA**

Assurance at the Ministry of Labour, explained that the project to develop the rewards and incentives system in the government sector represents a step in developing the government human resources system and linking motivation to performance and achievement, in line with the targets of Oman Vision 2040.

He pointed out that the project includes a modern electronic system that provides benefits and services to employees of the

State’s Administrative Apparatus units implementing the Ejada system, through strategic partnerships with private sector institutions and companies.

The forum also witnessed the honouring of leading government units in the application integrity index of the individual Ejada system for 2026, which included 13 government units, namely: Muscat Governorate, Dhofar Governorate, Ministry of Education, Oman Investment

Authority, Ministry of Health, Public Prosecution, Dhofar Municipality, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, Al Batinah North Governorate, Al Batinah South Governorate, Al Dhahirah Governorate and Muscat Municipality.

The forum featured a number of specialised working papers titled “The Future of Human Resources According to Ministry of Labour Trends,” “Institutional Innovation and Change Management,” “Personal Empowerment in the Government Sector,” and “The Role of Institutional Excellence in Enhancing Government Work Culture.” The forum also addressed “The Individual Ejada System: From Application to Impact,” “Developing Training Methodology in the Ejada System to Enhance Job Performance,” “Continuous Improvement Methodology,” and “Human Resources Planning in the Government Sector.” — **ONA**

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SHORTTAKES



KHAREEF
PROGRAMME BOOSTS
SMES AND LOCAL
TOURISM

STAFF REPORTER
SALALAH, AUGUST 10

More than 100 events, 136 free stalls for home-based businesses and a 35,000-square-metre agri-tourism destination are among the highlights of Khareef Dhofar Season 2026, as Dhofar Municipality expands the season's offering of entertainment, heritage, family activities and opportunities for local enterprises.

The municipality said activities will continue until September 21 across Salalah and several other wilayats. Key venues include Ittin Square, Awqad Children's Park, Al Saada and Al Gharif, while parts of the wider programme extend to Mirbat, Taqah and Sadah.

One of the most direct forms of support for small producers is the Al Fardhah Market, held as part of the Return of the Past event at Al Saada. The market provides 136 stalls free of charge to home-based businesses and artisans, reducing participation costs while giving them access to seasonal visitor demand.

Vendors offer frankincense, perfumes, traditional clothing, Omani khanjars, pottery, leather goods and other handicrafts. The municipality said one participant, Badr al Balushi, joined the market for the first time following an invitation from the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority.

The market forms part of a wider heritage programme recreating five environments associated with Dhofar.

SALALAH DESIGNATED AS REGIONAL RESILIENCE HUB

BAKHIT AL SHAHRI
SALALAH, AUGUST 10

THE city of Salalah has been designated as a Regional Resilience Hub by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). The city has also been designated as a Healthy City.

A celebration was held to mark the achievements under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, in presence of Shaikh Dr Said bin Humaid al Harthy, Wali of Salalah, on Monday.

The two achievements reflect the city's progress in enhancing quality of life and sustainability. They are the fruit of the integrated efforts aimed at building a healthier, safer city, better equipped to handle various future challenges.

The designation of Salalah as a Regional Resilience Hub follows its international recognition by the

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) under the Making Cities Resilient 2030 (MCR2030) initiative. Salalah becomes the first city in the Sultanate of Oman, the second in the Gulf region, and the third in the Arab world to receive international recognition. This achievement reflects Salalah's capabilities in disaster risk reduction and enhanced preparedness and response to challenges, alongside ongoing efforts to develop its institutional and community framework to support its adaptability and the continuity of its vital functions under various circumstances.

In the health sector, the Salalah Healthy City project represents a model of integrated work between governmental and private institutions, civil society organisations, and the local community.

This model stems from a comprehensive concept of health that goes beyond providing treatment services to include creating a healthy

and safe environment, promoting healthy lifestyles, enhancing safety and environmental quality, and supporting community participation in various areas related to human health and well-being.

The Salalah Healthy City and Resilience Hub achievements would enhance initiatives are part of efforts to achieve the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises human well-being, quality of life, and sustainability in national development, and seeks to build a society with advanced levels of prosperity and an environment conducive to sustainable development.

These achievements will contribute to the realisation of the goals of Oman Vision 2040, enhance Salalah's presence as a model for sustainable urban development and support ongoing efforts to develop an integrated urban environment that considers the needs of residents and visitors, combining health, preparedness, sustainability, and quality of life.



Dhofar opens licensing route for green tourism

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 10

Dhofar has a licensing framework for green tourism, including agricultural tourism, while proposals to integrate the governorate's diverse tourism experiences and extend them more widely could also be considered, according to the Director-General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate. Speaking to Radio Sultanate of Oman (Oman Radio), Talal bin Humaid al Khusaibi said agricultural tourism could be licensed under the green-tourism category in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

"When we speak about agricultural tourism, we also have a licence under the green tourism category, in cooperation and coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources," he said. His remarks were translated from Arabic.

Al Khusaibi placed green tourism within a broader range of tourism experiences already available

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has listed two green lodges among 121 licensed accommodation establishments in Dhofar

in Dhofar, including eco-camping, mountain, marine and leisure tourism. He said proposals to combine these experiences into integrated tourism offerings and extend them more widely could be studied.

The remarks confirm the availability of a licensing route for green tourism but do not indicate the launch of a new green-lodge programme, an expansion target or a specific pipeline of projects.

A breakdown published by Wejhatt on May 31, 2026, and attributed to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, listed two green lodges among 121 licensed accommodation establishments in Dhofar. The inventory comprised 39 hotels, 60 hotel apartments, three rest houses, 15 guest houses, one tourist camp and one heritage lodge, with a total of 8,390 rooms and 12,601 beds.

The two green lodges accounted for about 1.7 per cent of the establishments in the breakdown. A corresponding category-level table was not available on the public pages of the ministry or the National Centre for Statistics and Information reviewed by the Oman Observer, so the figure remains attributed to Wejhatt.

The regulatory framework supports



Al Khusaibi's remarks. The executive regulation issued in April 2026 provides for green lodges on land designated for agricultural use, while the ministry's licensing checklist requires approval from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Al Khusaibi also said media and influencer visits to Dhofar would continue. He said participants were selected following assessment rather than at random, and that the impact of such campaigns had been measured. The interview did not disclose campaign costs or the indicators used to assess their effectiveness. On visitor safety, he said the ministry provides guidance and works with specialist agencies, including the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority. Some locations are difficult to access and require specialist tour guides, while visitors to others need appropriate clothing and equipment, he said.

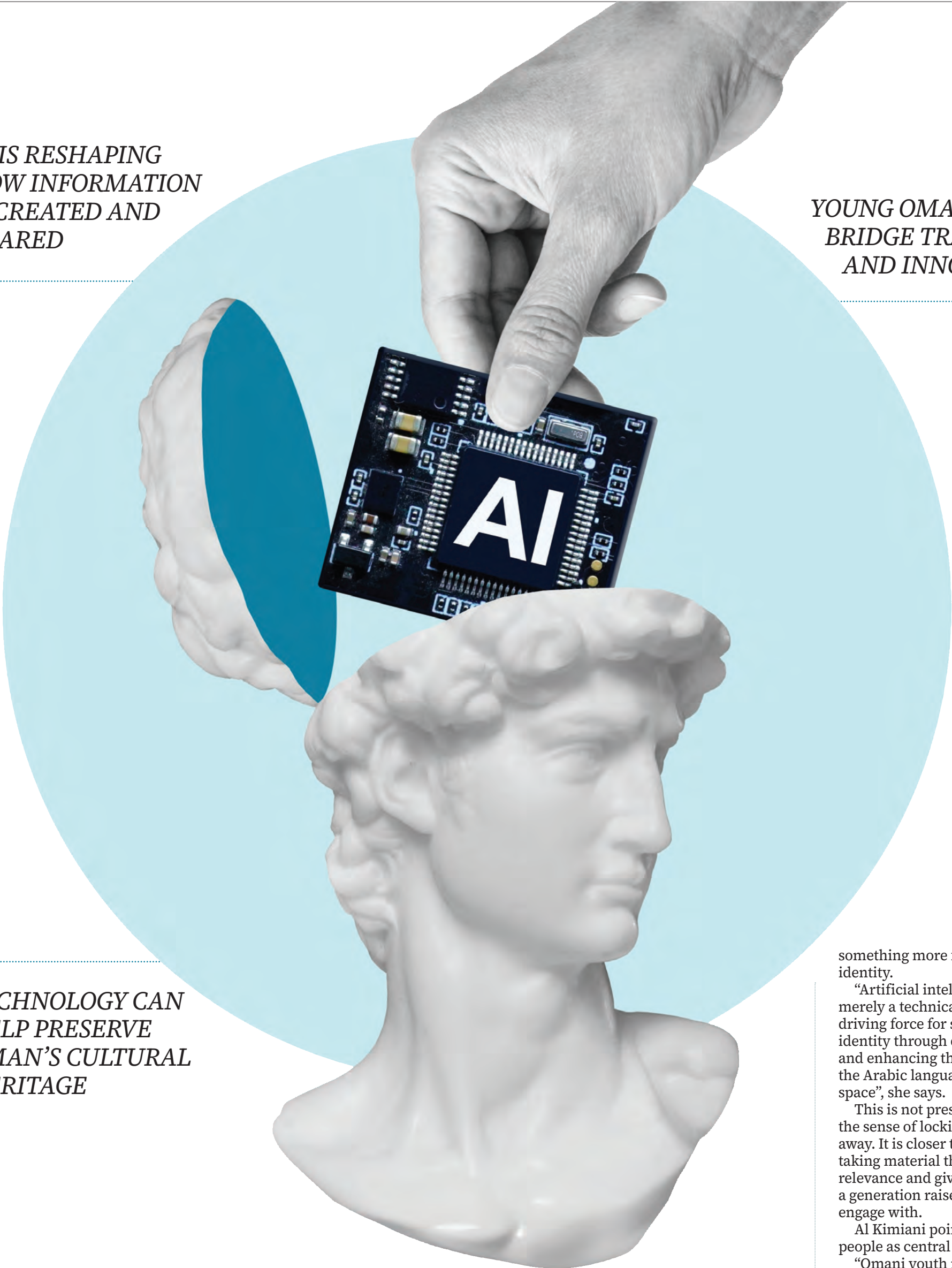
Al Khusaibi said tourism development in Dhofar is carried out through an integrated system involving various government entities. The programme's presenter also relayed questions from listeners about how small and medium enterprises and local communities benefit from tourism activity.

SPOTLIGHT

AI IS RESHAPING
HOW INFORMATION
IS CREATED AND
SHARED

YOUNG OMANIS CAN
BRIDGE TRADITION
AND INNOVATION

TECHNOLOGY CAN
HELP PRESERVE
OMAN’S CULTURAL
HERITAGE



WHERE AI MEETS TRUTH AND HERITAGE

MOHAMED AL BATTAHSI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE does not arrive in society with intentions of its own. It arrives as a tool and like any tool, its impact depends on the hand that uses it. In Oman, two conversations taking place almost simultaneously reveal how differently that hand can move — one warning against what AI can distort, the other showing what it can help preserve.

The first responsibility is defensive. As generative tools become capable of producing convincing text, images and videos within seconds, the line between what is real and what is fabricated has become increasingly difficult to discern.

Ayoub bin Suwailim al Ameri, Head of the Communication Development Section at the Department of Communication and Information Affairs, Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science,

frames the challenge in terms that apply to almost anyone with a phone.

“In today’s fast-paced information environment, the ability to verify information has become an essential skill for every individual”, he says. His guiding principle is simple: “verify before you believe and think before you share”.

That principle carries weight because of the speed at which information now travels. A single share or forward can carry a claim far beyond its original context, stripped of nuance and source and reach people with little opportunity to establish where it

began.

Misleading content can spread rapidly online because it is often emotionally charged and easily shared without scrutiny. In such an environment, pausing before sharing is not merely an act of caution. It is an essential checkpoint in an information system built around speed.

The second responsibility points in the opposite direction — not away from AI, but towards using it deliberately. At the University of Nizwa, Maryam al Kimiani of the Media and Marketing Department describes efforts to use the same generative capabilities that can spread misinformation to protect

something more fragile: cultural identity.

“Artificial intelligence is not merely a technical tool, but a driving force for strengthening identity through digitising heritage and enhancing the presence of the Arabic language in the digital space”, she says.

This is not preservation in the sense of locking heritage away. It is closer to translation — taking material that risks losing relevance and giving it a form that a generation raised on screens can engage with.

Al Kimiani points to young people as central to this process.

“Omani youth represent the bridge between the depth of the past and the horizons of the future”, she says. “By harnessing modern technologies, they are transforming heritage into interactive models that engage society, proving that staying rooted in identity is the true driver of innovation under Oman Vision 2040”.

Placed side by side, the two perspectives describe the same underlying condition. AI has removed several barriers that once slowed both truth and culture: the effort required to create a convincing falsehood and the effort required to digitise and share a tradition worth carrying forward.

Neither barrier is coming back. What remains is a choice about which side of that reduced friction individuals, institutions and societies choose to stand on.

The response in these two cases is neither to resist the technology nor to adopt it uncritically. Instead, it is to ask a more specific question in each situation: Is the message true? And can a tradition survive its translation into digital form?

Neither question has a permanent answer. Both will need to be asked repeatedly as the technology evolves.

But asking them deliberately and publicly is itself a form of defence — one built not on rejecting AI, but on refusing to give it the final word.

”

By harnessing modern technologies, the youth are transforming heritage into interactive models that engage society, proving that staying rooted in identity is the true driver of innovation under Oman Vision 2040.

MARYAM AL
KIMIANI
Media & Marketing
Department
University of
Nizwa

SHORT TAKES

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ISC’S HINDI WING CULTURAL EVENT ON AUGUST 21

MUSCAT: Laughter, satire, poetry and the vibrant tradition of the Indian Hasya Kavi Sammelan will take centre stage in Muscat as the Indian Social Club Oman – Hindi Wing, in association with GPT Group, presents the 30th edition of Hasya Mev Jayate, one of its popular cultural programmes.

The event will be held on Friday, August 21, at 7 pm at the Sheraton Hotel, Muscat, featuring an accomplished line-up of Hindi poets from India — Dinesh Raghuvarshi, Ajay Soni, Vinod Pal, Chetan Vijayvargiya and Binit Kumar.

For the Hindi-speaking community in Oman, Hasya Mev Jayate has evolved into more than an evening of entertainment. Over the years, the programme has celebrated the richness and versatility of the Hindi language while introducing audiences in Oman to the distinctive Indian tradition of Hasya Kavi Sammelan, where humour, poetry, satire and social observation come alive through live performance.

The 30th edition marks a significant milestone for the programme and reflects the enduring appeal of Hindi humorous poetry among audiences in Oman. It also underscores the Hindi Wing’s continuing efforts to promote the Hindi language, literature and Indian culture while contributing to Oman’s vibrant multicultural landscape.

The event is being presented with the support of several organisations from Oman’s business community. Oman Observer is the Media Partner for the milestone edition, helping bring the celebration of Hindi poetry, humour and Indian culture to a wider audience across Oman.

SQU PREPARES TO WELCOME 41ST STUDENT COHORT

MUSCAT: Preparations are under way to welcome Sultan Qaboos University’s 41st cohort of new students for the 2026-2027 academic year, with 963 male and female applicants currently taking ability assessments for selected programmes.

The assessments are being conducted for applicants to Art Education, Physical Education and Sports Sciences, Music and Musicology, and Architectural Engineering, as well as for students with disabilities.

The numbers include 301 applicants for Art Education, 303 for Physical Education, 120 for Music and Musicology, and 121 for Architectural Engineering, alongside 118 students in the programme for students with disabilities. The assessments will continue until August 12.

Held annually in cooperation with the College of Education, the College of Arts and Social Sciences, and the College of Engineering, the ability assessments are overseen by committees comprising academic and administrative staff. These committees are responsible for preparing and administering the assessments in accordance with the approved admission requirements and procedures.

The 41st cohort of students admitted on the basis of General Education Diplomas will be welcomed to SQU on August 30.

As part of the preparations, an orientation programme will be organised for the new students, featuring introductory meetings, campus tours and lectures designed to familiarise them with university life. The programme will begin with a gathering in the Grand Hall, where students will be welcomed and provided with essential information and guidance on university rules and regulations to support them throughout their academic journey.

Committees and teams have also been formed to coordinate admission, reception and orientation arrangements, ensuring a smooth transition for the new cohort as they begin their university studies.

RAFO band excels in Scotland intl music competition

PERTH: The band of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) secured overall first place in the World Music Competition held in Perth, Scotland, as part of the Grade 4B contests.

The RAFO band also won first place in the bagpipe group and second place in the drum group.

The RAFO team secured second place in the World Music Contest (WMC) held in Perth in the 3rd Global Level (B).

In addition, the RAFO team



The RAFO band also won first place in the bagpipe group and second place in the drum group. — ONA

secured the top three places in the individual baton-bearers’ competition. Warrant Officer Mohammed bin Khamis al Amri took first place, followed by Staff Sergeant Mahmoud bin Yousuf al Sinani in second, and Captain Humaid bin Sulaiman al Ghafri in third. These accomplishments reflect the Sultanate of Oman’s advanced artistic skills and discipline in military music, highlighting the country’s strong presence on the global stage. — ONA

Food security sectors grow 44 per cent, create 2,000 jobs

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

OMAN’S FOOD security-related sectors recorded a 44-per cent development rate by the end of the first quarter of 2026, while more than 2,000 jobs were created during the period, underscoring the growing contribution of agriculture, fisheries, livestock and water resources to economic diversification and domestic production.

Eng Khalsa bint Talib al Hadhrami, Director-General of Planning at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said the sector’s growth is contributing directly to increased domestic production and efforts to replace imported products with locally produced alternatives.

“The growth directly contributes to increasing domestic production and, in turn, strengthens our ability to replace imports. This is being pursued through what we call the localisation of production and import substitution programme, particularly by expanding the cultivation of strategic crops, developing production and placing greater emphasis on manufacturing,” she said.

She noted that investment projects launched under the Tenth Five-Year Plan, along with projects being completed this year, have contributed to the expansion of food security-related activities.

The growth has also supported employment, with more than 2,000 job opportunities created during the first quarter of 2026 across



Agriculture and fisheries are playing an increasingly important role not only in national food security but also in economic diversification and sustainable development.

The continued expansion of investment in agriculture, fisheries, livestock and water resources forms part of Oman’s broader efforts to strengthen domestic production and build a more resilient food system

agriculture, fisheries, livestock and water resources.

“These figures confirm that economic growth is beginning to translate directly into creating employment opportunities for citizens,” Al Hadhrami said.

The continued expansion of investment in these sectors forms part of Oman’s broader efforts to strengthen domestic production and build a more resilient food system. Greater focus on strategic crops and local production is expected to reduce dependence on imports while supporting farmers, fishermen, livestock producers and other local businesses.

The emphasis on manufacturing is also helping to extend value chains beyond primary production by creating opportunities in

processing, packaging and related activities. This can increase the economic value generated from local resources while opening new avenues for private-sector investment and employment.

Agriculture and fisheries, together with livestock and water resources, are therefore playing an increasingly important role not only in national food security but also in economic diversification and sustainable development.

With continued investment and the implementation of food security projects, Oman is seeking to strengthen the contribution of non-oil sectors to economic growth, expand local production and create employment opportunities for citizens, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Human Rights Commission promotes awareness

SALALAH: The Oman Human Rights Commission has implemented a human rights awareness and education programme in Dhofar Governorate, coinciding with Khareef Dhofar Season 2026.

More than 340 people from various segments of society benefited from the programme, which forms part of the Commission’s efforts to promote a culture of human rights across the governorates of Oman.

Implemented in cooperation and coordination with several institutions, the programme included the distribution of more than 2,500 awareness and research publications and 104 awareness posters to various organisations and institutions.

The publications included research studies on human rights issues for researchers, booklets designed to raise children’s awareness of abuse, bullying and related issues, as well as the



Over 2,500 research publications and 104 awareness posters were distributed.

Commission’s annual reports and informational materials on international conventions.

The posters highlighted the international conventions to which Oman has acceded and national protection mechanisms for women, children and persons with disabilities.

The programme also featured a series of training workshops and interactive activities held alongside the Ministry of Education’s summer programme for school students, ‘My Summer... Learning and Innovation.’

The activities included

workshops on the role of the Oman Human Rights Commission in protecting and promoting children’s rights, conducted in cooperation with a number of schools. Children also took part in activities such as ‘Colour and Learn Your Rights’ and sessions on self-protection mechanisms, organised in cooperation with the Bahja Omani Association for Orphans.

Specialised workshops were also held for Girl Guides at the Ashur Scout Camp and for members of the Omani Special Olympics at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah.

The programme was implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Social Development Committee in the Wilayat of Taqah, several civil society organisations and the Omani Special Olympics. — ONA

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



People wave to Kurds who make their way to their hometown of Ras al Ain in Hasakah. — Reuters

HUNDREDS OF SYRIA KURDS HEAD BACK TO BORDER TOWN

HASAKAH: A first group of Syrian Kurds were headed for the northeastern border town of Ras al Ain on Monday following years of displacement, months after an integration deal between the Kurds and Damascus. The January agreement on merging Kurdish forces and civil institutions into the state included the return of displaced Kurds but residents of Ras al Ain had still been waiting, prompting appeals to authorities for assistance.

Jawan Issa, from a committee representing displaced people from Ras al Ain, said that a “first batch” of some 2,500 people were headed home on Monday. “This step is the result of efforts by all sides and ongoing coordination” between the Damascus and Kurdish authorities, he said, adding that “the second batch will be transferred in the coming days”.

A correspondent saw dozens of trucks waiting to set off from near the city of Hasakeh, with men, women and children eager to depart.

The committee representing displaced people from Ras al Ain said Monday’s transfer was “the start of a path towards a full return”, emphasising the need to protect property, housing and land rights”. — **AFP**

NEPAL LEADER HOLDS MEETINGS WITH INDIA, CHINA ENVOYS



BALENDRA SHAH
Nepal's Prime Minister

KATHMANDU: Nepal’s Prime Minister Balendra Shah is holding his first one-on-one meetings with envoys from neighbouring giants China and India, his office said. The leader, 36, better known as “Balen”, has kept low profile since taking power

in March, largely avoiding hosting foreign envoys individually. The landlocked Himalayan nation of 30 million people must ensure a delicate diplomatic balance between rivals New Delhi and Beijing.

Shah, speaking ahead of his election, said that he wanted to “maintain a natural relationship” with both nations. He has previously only met foreign ambassadors in groups, while visits to China and India in June were made by Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal.

Shah’s office said he had met with India’s ambassador on Monday morning, and would meet China’s envoy later in the day. “The two discussed various matters related to Nepal-India bilateral friendship, mutual interests, development partnership, and areas of cooperation,” his office said in a statement after meeting with India’s ambassador.

India has long considered Nepal as a traditional ally, with open borders along the plains. Kathmandu’s largest trading partner is India, accounting for 63 per cent of Nepal’s imports, or \$8.6 billion, followed by China at 13 per cent, or \$1.8 billion. The meeting with China comes after a major international academic conference on Tibet, in which more than 700 delegates were due to meet in the Nepali capital. — **AFP**

EX-THAI MP SHOTS DEAD LOCAL OFFICIAL OVER MONEY ROW

BANGKOK: A former Thai MP on Monday shot dead a local government official in broad daylight over a financial dispute before being arrested and confessing to journalists at the police station. The attack took place outside a government building in Nonthaburi province, north of Bangkok, just days after a school shooting in the same region that raised questions over gun control in Thailand.

Flanked by police officers following his arrest, former MP

Chalong Riewrang told reporters he had tried to talk to local official Thongchai Yenprasert about money. “I followed him to his car and hit his car’s window, saying I want to talk. He said he will not talk, so I pulled my gun,” Chalong admitted, handcuff-free and smoking a cigarette. “I did not aim to shoot, but his driver pulled a gun and pointed it at me so I fired.”

Thongchai, who was chairman of the Nonthaburi local government administration, later died of his

wounds. He was hit in the neck and lost a lot of blood, the director said. Thongchai’s driver was also shot, wounded in his right arm, but he successfully underwent surgery, Sakon said.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters that no one in Thailand except on-duty officials was legally allowed to carry a gun in public, noting the last gun-carry licences were issued three years ago and were only valid for one year. — **AFP**

Storms soak China’s east, ground nearly 950 flights

TORRENTIAL RAIN and storms in Typhoon Dolphin’s wake inundated several provinces in China’s east, drenching the coastal region and flooding streets in Shanghai, where around 40 per cent of flights were grounded on Monday due to the weather. Dolphin packed maximum sustained winds of 151 kph near its centre when it made landfall in Zhejiang, the province to the south and west of Shanghai, on Sunday evening before weakening to a tropical storm. Its remaining rain clouds continued to soak the eastern provinces including Anhui, Jiangsu and Shandong on Monday.



Power restoration workers clear a fallen tree and restrnging power lines in Zhejiang province, China. — Reuters

Many streets in Shanghai, the country’s second most populous city, were flooded, including in the main commercial centres. The city’s two airports cancelled a total of 943 flights due to the typhoon, reducing capacity by nearly 40 per cent, state broadcaster CCTV said. China Eastern Airlines said on Monday it was trying to resume flights to Shanghai, Zhejiang and other destinations in an “orderly manner.”

Shanghai’s suburban Jiading and Qingpu districts remained waterlogged, according to live-streams shared by residents on social media. The live videos, not verified by Reuters, showed people wading through knee-high murky water. “It rained almost all night last night.

Beijing is expected to experience “significant rainfall” from Tuesday until Thursday, with authorities warning of the risk of flash floods and landslides. The typhoon had already travelled 6,000 km before it made landfall, giving it a life-cycle three times longer than an ordinary typhoon

When I woke up this morning, I found the neighbourhood flooded, and the streets were severely flooded,” said 39-year-old Hou Lina, who works in sales in Jiading in Shanghai. “I’ve lived in Shanghai for 10 years, and this is the first time I’ve experienced such inconvenience from a typhoon. This is the first time I’ve encountered such widespread flooding,” she said.

In Shanghai’s Jinshan, the district authority said non-essential businesses and organisations could temporarily halt operations, classes, outdoor events and transit services, amid forecasts of continued strong winds and heavy rain on Monday. Powerful winds and lashing rain flipped over a truck in Zhejiang’s Wenzhou, a video posted on TikTok on Sunday showed. It was not clear what happened to the driver. Authorities warned that 74 rivers in

the Taihu Lake basin and the coastal areas of eastern Zhejiang have exceeded warning levels, and that flood risks for small and medium-sized rivers in heavy rainfall areas are high.

The strongest typhoon to hit China this year, Dolphin is forecast to move deeper inland to the central provinces of Hubei and Henan in the coming days while also pushing moisture north. Authorities in the capital Beijing raised warnings for torrential rain and said the city was prepared to activate its flood control response on Tuesday morning.

Beijing is expected to experience “significant rainfall” from Tuesday until Thursday, with authorities warning of the risk of flash floods in the city and landslides in the surrounding mountainous areas. The typhoon had already travelled 6,000 km before it made landfall, giving it a life-cycle three times longer than an ordinary typhoon, and bringing with it an ultra-large cloud system that enveloped China’s east, CCTV said in another report.

Dolphin’s impact was also being compared to Doksurei in 2023. That typhoon crossed the country after causing destruction in Fujian province, unleashing record-breaking rainfall. As the storm clouds meet colder air in the north, Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei will need to brace for heavy rain.— **Reuters**



INDONESIA SEES EIGHTH DAY OF WILDFIRES

SURABAYA: Indonesian firefighters backed by helicopters and drones battled devastating flames for an eighth day on Monday in a national park on Java Island where over 500 hectares have been lost, an official said. The blaze has forced the closure of the Bromo Tengger Semeru National Park, a popular tourist destination and razed an area equivalent to more than 700 football fields.

By Monday, “the fire has spread toward residential areas” in the Dingklik Valley area of the park, East Java disaster mitigation agency official Satriyo Nurseno said. Two water-bombing helicopters, several fire trucks and drones with sprinklers were aiding forest rangers and soldiers deployed to fight the flames, Satriyo added. Forestry Minister Raja Juli Antoni said on Sunday it would not be possible to fly cloud-seeding missions to trigger rain over the Bromo area for several days given the lack of clouds.

Flames devoured more than 500 hectares of land on Mount Bromo in 2023, sparked by a couple lighting a flare during a pre-wedding photo shoot. Indonesia is forecast to experience a long, intense dry season this year with high risk for drought and wildfires due in part to the El Nino weather phenomenon, the weather agency BMKG has said. — **AFP**

EDU SYSTEM DEMANDS

Indian students step up exam protests



Indian students marched towards the state assembly in Jharkhand, escalating protests over alleged irregularities in government recruitment examinations, with several students also on hunger strike. Protests in Ranchi began on July 29, days after a youth-led “cockroach” movement in New Delhi forced the resignation of the national education minister. At least six protesters are on hunger strike, including student leader Devendra Nath Mahto, 33, who has been fasting for more than a week. — **AFP**

SEVERE WEATHER

Rain leaves at least 16 dead in Philippines



Floods, landslides and accidents driven by a nine-day downpour equivalent to more than a month’s worth of rain in some areas have killed at least 16 people in the northern Philippines. Seven of the deaths occurred in the resort of Baguio, as a rain-drenched mountainside collapsed on three houses. State weather forecaster Dan Villamil said rains in the vacation town, four hours north of the capital, were already 47 per cent higher than normal for the whole month. — **AFP**

APPALLING IMAGES

230 migrants cross Channel in a small boat



A record 230 migrants in one small boat crossed the Channel to Britain, media said, in the latest example of larger numbers of people packing into a single vessel. The 230, including children, were counted aboard the rubber dinghy as it departed the northeastern French coast amid chaotic scenes. Prime Minister Andy Burnham’s spokesman said it was “shocking” to see “appalling images ... of young babies being put into these unseaworthy craft”. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES



People gather outside a building following an earthquake in Bogota, Colombia. — Reuters

MAJOR QUAKE
ROCKS COLOMBIA &
NEIGHBORS, DOZENS
CONFIRMED DEAD

BOGOTA: A powerful earthquake rocked Colombia and neighboring Latin American countries on Monday, with at least 69 people confirmed dead in first reports as shocked residents surveyed destroyed buildings. Emergency teams rushed to help victims and search for survivors in the rubble after geologists recorded the quake at a magnitude of 7.4 with an epicenter 100 km deep in the west of the country.

The early-morning quake was also felt in Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela — itself hit by a devastating quake in late June — and prompted building evacuations in the Colombian capital Bogota. News footage showed collapsed buildings across western Colombia. Scores of people were killed in the city of Pereira alone, Mayor Mauricio Salazar told Caracol Radio, adding “the situation is critical.”

The governor of Colombia’s Choco province said that there was serious damage in the provincial capital Quibdo, where video showed collapsed buildings. Choco was at the epicentre of the quake, and the death toll from the area was not immediately known. Alejandro Eder, the mayor of Cali, reported at least 20 buildings had collapsed and people were trapped as “major damage” that was being evaluated with drones. — AFP

RHINE COULD BECOME UNNAVIGABLE



Parts of the Rhine river in Germany could soon become unnavigable as water levels drop further due to soaring summer temperatures and low rainfall, an industry group warned on Monday. Levels have been at record lows since the end of July as Germany, like elsewhere in Europe, struggles through a series of heatwaves. Cargo ships have managed to continue transporting goods along the waterway, which flows through the industrial heartland of Europe’s top economy, albeit with reduced loads and at higher costs. But the BDB association of inland shipping warned the water level at the town of Kaub is expected to fall even further this week. — AFP

US, SOUTH
KOREA TO
DRILL FOR
NEW THREATS
FROM NORTH

SEOUL: South Korean and US forces will hold major joint drills next week simulating combat against North Korean troops battle-hardened by deployment in the Russia-Ukraine war, an exercise spokesman said on Monday. The “Ulchi Freedom Shield” exercise is a regular summer fixture for South Korea’s armed forces and their US allies, designed to steel them for defence against the nuclear-armed North.

This year’s 11-day exercise starting on August 17 will account for the changing “character of warfare”, said Colonel Ryan Donald,

spokesman for the US and South Korean Combined Forces Command. “DPRK soldiers have deployed and fought in Ukraine,” he told reporters, using an acronym for the North’s official name, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. “They’ve taken those lessons they learned there and brought them back to North Korea,” he said. “That changes the DPRK capability, and our training accounts for that threat.”

The exercise — enlisting 18,000 South Korean troops and counterparts from the US contingent of 28,500 in the country

— will have a heightened focus on drone warfare, GPS disruption and the role of cyber attacks, he said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Sunday that “a decision has been made for 30,000 to 50,000 North Koreans to be deployed on the territory of Russia”. “They are studying this war,” he said. “If we are talking about crises and escalation in another region — in the Pacific — which could pose a threat to other Asian countries, then North Korea will certainly gain experience in modern warfare under Russia.” — AFP

Ukraine strike on Russian
oil-refining city kills 13

A UKRAINIAN drone strike on the central Russian region of Tatarstan killed at least 13 people in one of the deadliest attacks carried out by Kyiv since the war began more than four years ago. Kyiv said it had struck an oil refinery in the industrial city of Nizhnekamsk, more than 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) away from the Ukrainian border. Both sides have significantly escalated their long-range attacks this year, causing a spike in civilian deaths, according to the United Nations.

“At this moment, 13 people have been killed” in the attack on Nizhnekamsk, the regional press service said in a statement on Monday. Another 75 people were wounded, 21 of which had been hospitalised, the authorities added. Russia’s Tatarstan region is rich in energy resources and has many major oil refineries that Kyiv has been targeting in retaliatory strikes. Unverified footage on social media showed a large black smoke cloud billowing at the site of an oil facility.

Ukraine’s General Staff said it had struck the Taneko refinery, controlled by oil giant Tatneft, as part of a campaign of “reducing the military potential of the Russian aggressor”. Russia’s Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said a child was among those killed. So too were citizens from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, according to the regional government.

Russia also hit Ukraine with deadly strikes on Monday. Near the front line, a Russian artillery strike killed five people in a village in the northeastern Kharkiv region, local Ukrainian officials said. “On August 10, Russian forces carried out a massive artillery strike on the residential area of the village of Bugaivka in the Chuguiv district. Various houses were destroyed as a result of the enemy attack. Five people were killed,” regional prosecutor’s office said in a statement on Telegram. It posted a picture of a house reduced to rubble by the attack.

Russia’s defence ministry said it shot down 456 Ukrainian drones fired overnight. It never states how many reached their targets. The Tatarstan region had earlier reported a “massive” Ukrainian drone attack. Ukraine’s



A firefighter works at a site of an apartment building damaged during a Russian air strike in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. — Reuters

air force said Russia fired 126 drones in its overnight attack. A woman was also killed in a Ukrainian attack on the Russian border region of Belgorod, and a man was killed in a Russian drone strike on a taxi in the frontline Kherson region, officials there said.

In Ukraine’s southern Odesa region, tens of thousands of households were still without power after Russian struck the power grid over the weekend.

Concerns are rising in Kyiv over the upcoming winter, with the energy network still reeling from four years of Russian strikes. Last winter, millions were plunged into darkness and had their heating and water cut for hours as temperatures sunk to -20C.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned on the weekend that his country has “virtually no intact thermal power plants” following the Russian attacks. Kyiv has also been running short of vital missile interceptors as Russia has significantly escalated its attacks with hard-to-intercept ballistic missiles. Dozens have been killed in

Kyiv over the last two months in direct hits on apartment buildings.

Meanwilen, Germany will beef up its anti-drone police unit, the government said on Monday, days after an explosives-laden unmanned aerial vehicle was flown into a strategically important airport. Berlin was shocked by the incident last week when the UAV was defused after it was found near a Ukrainian cargo plane at Leipzig-Halle airport, a key hub for military equipment transports.

Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt — who labelled the incident a “hybrid attack scenario” potentially involving a “foreign power” — now plans to double personnel in the federal police anti-drone unit to 300. The number of operational bases for the unit will rise from four to eight, a ministry spokeswoman added at a press conference. She also said that Dobrindt would next week formally open a new drone technology research centre, attached to the German Aerospace Center. — AFP

Europe braces for another summer heatwave, issues warnings

PARIS: Much of Europe is bracing for yet another heatwave following periods of scorching temperatures that have driven rivers to record lows, ignited historic forest fires and contributed to thousands of deaths. Parts of Britain and France on Monday were already under extreme heat warnings with forecasts of temperatures around the mid-30s Celsius. Unusually high temperatures were also forecast in coming days across a swathe of countries not accustomed to the heat, such as Switzerland, Austria and Hungary. Europe’s weather warning system MeteoAlarm on Monday said scorching temperatures are already being felt across much of Italy and coastal areas of Croatia.

The United Kingdom’s Met Office warned at the weekend that the summer’s fifth hot spell was about to take hold in a country whose infrastructure has been built for a more temperate, cooler climate. “Yet another spell of extremely hot weather is set to spread north across much of the UK with temperatures reaching the mid-30s Celsius in places,” it said on X on

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People walk past a misting fan during a heatwave in Rome at the Colosseum. — AFP

Sunday. Half of England and the whole of Wales is already officially in drought — leaving 23 million people subject to hosepipe bans — with more English regions expected to be declared in drought later on Monday. Next to no rain was in forecasts for impacted areas this week.

In France, the national weather agency Meteo-France warned on Monday that the southeast would see temperatures as high as 35°C, spreading further across the country as the week progresses. “The intense heat will affect almost the entire country between Wednesday and Friday,” it said in a bulletin. The agency also warned that due to climate change, “future summers will generally be hotter than those experienced to date”. Both France and the UK have seen thousands of excess deaths during previous heatwaves this year.

Greece reported its second fire this season to spark near the capital Athens on Monday, dispatching hundreds of crew and equipment. Already, more than 10,000 hectares of pine forests were blackened by a blaze that broke out 10 days ago northwest of the capital.

France and Spain have already seen historic wildfires so far this summer, with record levels of drought causing tinder-dry conditions. Heat and drought are also driving rivers across Europe to

record lows. The Rhine in Germany could drop so much it becomes unnavigable, industry groups warned on Monday. Cargo ships have managed to continue transporting goods along the river, which flows through the industrial heartland of Europe’s top economy, but with reduced loads and at higher costs.

And Polish officials announced that the Vistula, the country’s longest river, had matched its record low in Warsaw on Monday — a record only set on Friday. Low levels along the Danube river have already forced Hungary and Romania to shutter its nuclear plants, which rely on the water for cooling, since late July.

Nearly 120 million Europeans live in regions where July 2026 was the hottest ever recorded, according to an analysis of national weather agencies and Copernicus climate data. The records were concentrated in southern Britain, western France, and northern and eastern Spain. At least 12,000 excess deaths were recorded across nine European countries during one heatwave in June. — AFP

OPINION

Reopening Strait of Hormuz is a humanitarian imperative



EDITORIAL

THE WAR involving Iran, launched by the United States and Israel, is approaching its sixth month. Missile and drone attacks on civilian areas have eased from their peak, but the war of rhetoric and the blockade of a vital cargo waterway continue unabated. The most significant consequence has been the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world’s busiest routes for shipments of crude oil, fertilisers, chemicals, and other essential goods.

Even in the Sultanate of Oman, prices of essential and basic items have nearly doubled since the conflict began. The rise is driven by shipping delays, higher insurance premiums for vessels in the region, and shortages of raw materials in producing countries that rely on Hormuz for exports.

According to the United Nations, the disruption in the Strait of Hormuz has exposed the vulnerability of global trade to a single maritime choke-point. Data show sharp declines in exports of energy, fertilisers, and industrial products that normally transit the strait.

Another critical consequence of the attacks on cargo and crude tankers is marine pollution from damaged vessels.

On Monday, the Environment Authority (EA) and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information

Technology (MoTCIT) said they are continuing efforts to address the grounding of the vessel ‘Caroline Bezengi’ off the Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands in the Dhofar Governorate.

The response includes technical measures to contain the oil spill, secure the vessel, and conduct ongoing environmental monitoring and assessment to mitigate risks, protect the marine environment, and ensure navigational safety.

In recent weeks, cautious hopes for a breakthrough in the Hormuz stalemate have emerged. Iran, however, has issued a list of conditions it says must be met before commercial vessels can move freely and global markets can stabilise.

The demands include lifting the US naval blockade and sanctions, withdrawing US military forces from the immediate region, paying war reparations, releasing frozen Iranian assets, ending attacks on Iranian-aligned groups in the region, and halting public threats against Iran.

It is worth recalling that the conflict did not begin over disputes about the Strait of Hormuz. As recently as February 28, commercial ships transited the waterway without restriction.

In June, US President Trump announced that an agreement had been reached to end hostilities, reopen the Strait, and lift the US

The disruption in the Strait of Hormuz has highlighted the vulnerability of global trade to a single maritime chokepoint, with exports of energy, fertilisers and industrial goods that normally transit the waterway recording sharp declines

naval blockade on ships travelling to and from Iranian ports.

The initial memorandum of understanding extended a ceasefire first agreed in April for 60 days, during which both sides pledged to negotiate contentious issues including Iran’s nuclear programme and sanctions relief.

With the US maintaining the naval blockade during the ceasefire period, Iran responded by stopping and, in several cases, attacking vessels attempting to cross the Strait without its approval. Insurance rates spiked, shipping lines rerouted around the Cape of Good Hope, and transit times increased by up to three weeks.

Wars of this nature benefit no party in the long term, and they rarely reach a logical conclusion. Their primary victims are innocent civilians who have no role in the conflict. Many civilians in Iran and Lebanon have lost their lives directly to strikes.

Beyond that, countless indirect victims worldwide, especially in low-income countries, have been pushed into poverty and debt. Higher fuel costs have raised food prices, disrupted aid deliveries, and strained public budgets already under pressure.

Reopening the Strait of Hormuz is not only an economic necessity but a humanitarian one. Until navigation resumes safely and predictably, the costs will continue to be paid by ordinary people far from the frontlines.

HUNGARY MEDIA EYES POST-ORBAN RENEWAL

ANDRAS ROSTOVANYI

A month after Hungary’s state broadcaster MTVA suspended its news programmes, many employees are still waiting at home to hear when - or if - they can return to work.

Reorganising the state media was a key campaign pledge for pro-EU Prime Minister Peter Magyar, who ousted leader Viktor Orban in April’s elections, promising a “system change”.

The self-styled “illiberal” system Orban developed during his 16 years in power drew criticism from the European Union over rule of law issues.

“We feel anxious and hopeful at the same time,” one longtime public media employee said, speaking on condition of anonymity as staff are not allowed to give interviews.

“Even people who never served any political agenda are worried for their jobs... But we’re also optimistic that we can finally serve the public,” she added.

Private media companies are also feeling the effects of the change in administration Mediaworks, which describes itself as Hungary’s leading conservative media company and is close to Orban’s Fidesz party, announced in June it was firing 200 people of its 2,000 staff.

More than a dozen of the group’s daily newspapers have either gone out of print or switched to weekly publication, as flagship outlet Magyar Nemzet did this month.

The independent rival Nepszava also ceased its print edition in late May due to the debt it accumulated to Mediaworks, which printed the newspaper, leaving Hungary without a political daily.

At MTVA, a relaunch is slated for later this month, with several insiders anticipating a return of TV news broadcasting on August 20, the central European country’s national holiday.

Interim management - appointed by the government - has been mum on the details, and multiple employees said that they are having to rely on internal rumours and occasional press statements for updates.

For now, while camera crews still record events deemed newsworthy, the footage is directly archived without being broadcast.

MTVA’s main channels suspended news broadcasts on July 7, two weeks after parliament passed a media reform bill, apologising in an on-air message for “lying” for years. — AFP

Small habits, big changes: building a better future

COMMON SENSE suggests that a person’s future is not determined only by major decisions. It is also shaped by the small actions repeated each day. Habits influence our health, knowledge, discipline, and emotional well-being. For this reason, it is often possible to predict the future by observing present habits, as daily routines affect growth over time.

Although habits have a powerful influence on the future, changing them is rarely easy. Many books, most notably ‘The Atomic Habits’, have discussed how long it takes to form or replace a habit.

Some claim that a new habit can be formed in twenty-one days, while others suggest that it may take several months. The exact period is probably different for every person and every habit. Drinking more water may be easier than beginning a demanding exercise routine. Nonetheless, lasting change always requires patience, repetition, and a practical system.

This need for consistency is closely connected to a useful principle: “Forget the mood; stick to the plan.”

People often depend on motivation when they decide to improve their lives. Someone may plan to walk or exercise every day, but only follow the plan when feeling energetic. On difficult days, the person may not be in the mood and may avoid exercise completely. Since mood is temporary and unpredictable, it cannot provide a strong foundation for change. A clear structure is more reliable because it provides direction even when motivation is absent.

In my opinion, the beginning of a new academic year can be a suitable time to create such a structure. August is commonly a month of rest for students, academics, and many



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University



Habit tracking keeps important goals present in the mind and reduces our dependence on mood.

other people. When September arrives, academic work begins again, and people return to their usual responsibilities. As a result, September often feels like a fresh beginning and offers a valuable opportunity to establish better routines.

With this idea of a fresh start in mind, I recently decided to turn a notebook into a weekly habit-tracking journal. I created my own system and listed the habits I wanted to develop. For each habit, I recorded its frequency and duration. In the case of meditation, for instance, I wrote down how many times I planned to meditate and how long each session should or does last. I also included hydration and set a target for the number of cups of water I wanted to drink each day. I intend to reproduce the tracking page every week so that I can observe my progress over time.

The value of this system became clear almost immediately. As soon as I woke up the next day and looked at the tracker, the habits I had listed came to the forefront of my mind.

Instead of waiting to feel motivated, I knew what I was supposed to do. I began my day with prayer and meditation. However, although I had planned to drink water first, I drank tea instead. I recorded this honestly as a missed goal rather than pretending that I had succeeded.

Even so, this small failure was useful because the tracker increased my awareness. The following morning, drinking a glass of water became one of my first thoughts after waking. I then added vitamin C as a part of my morning ritual. Therefore, the purpose of tracking is not to achieve perfection immediately. It is to notice mistakes, learn from them, and continue trying.

Ultimately, habit tracking turns intentions into visible commitments. It keeps important goals present in the mind and reduces our dependence on mood. Our future may not be completely predictable, but our daily habits reveal the direction in which we are moving. By creating structure, recording progress, and remaining consistent, we can gradually build the future we want.

Nature silently suffers wars



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

SOME PEOPLE could be safer in their part of the world and they might think they are far from a war scenario.

We might have to think again.

I am reminded of a quote by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, “The conservation of the environment is the responsibility of all of us, a responsibility that knows no political boundaries”.

Of course, we have already seen the impact of conflict on the economic sector, affecting commerce and trade ranging from food commodities to cooking gas.

In some Asian countries restaurants closed due to the disruption in cooking gas, resulting in job losses. Unknowingly, lifestyle has been affected. At times in life we do not just look at affordability. We appreciate the ambience and the surroundings that create moments for us. This is indulgence, some might say and others might simply describe it as thriving by enhancing the experience. Thus, restaurants try to create unforgettable experiences.

Now nature does this without an effort. Nature enthusiasts know the importance and influence of nature on the mind and that is why they seek the wilderness, the mountains and the sea. When you interact directly with nature, somewhere during the experience, you feel the connection. We can feel the difference when we spend just a few minutes in the garden.

People in war zones have to think of

many ways to survive. They have to think of bunkers and underground fortifications to live safely. A deep contrast to what people are otherwise blessed with on earth — fresh air and places to walk around freely.

The birds have a will to fly wherever they want, yet man is constrained out of fear due to human behaviour.

We have what they don't have — ego.

As a child I was impressed with the idea that the major difference between humans and animals was that we can talk and express ourselves! And most importantly, I was convinced humans were superior because we could think. We have numerous languages and grammars to learn, but we seem to fail to communicate.

Growing up, I have realised thinking can be a disadvantage, especially when it is laced with preconceived notions that are influenced by insecurities, fear, lack of awareness, selfishness, a superiority complex and most importantly, ego. They are all interrelated. To prove one's stand, they can go to any length, failing to realise that nothing is forever.

We might be under the impression that war is somewhere far away from us, but we fail to understand the environment knows no borders.

Destruction is the result when missiles cross skies and borders to hit targets to eliminate what they think is danger. Along with the chaos, one contributes to pollution of

People in war zones have to think of many ways to survive. They have to think of bunkers and underground fortifications to live safely. A deep contrast to what people are otherwise blessed with on earth — fresh air and places to walk around freely

the environment encompassing land, sea and air as well as a wounded generation that grows up in conflict with vengeance in their hearts.

The impact of missiles is not just an eyesore. It runs deep through the veins. Nature cannot scream, but soil and water pollution reaches us through food. The food market today is global and if we were worried about genetically modified produce, who and when would we assess the produce of the current situation?

Wars result in toxic pollution, massive carbon emissions and the destruction of vital ecosystems as well as ground water pollution and oil spills. A war can produce an umpteen number of greenhouse gases. So who is counting the carbon footprint?

We pollute the land just like we pollute our minds. This land is not just for us but a promise for the future generations.

It is just like some people wanting trees to be cut only because they shed leaves. Blessed are you if you can stand under the shade of a tree, for we do not often realise how much they contribute to the air we breathe.

We humans often do not know what our blessings are. We tend to become even worse neighbours in the neighbourhood, unable to accept others and let people be.

Imagine how boring it would have been if everyone were identical in thinking and living.

There must have been a reason why we are all born with different fingerprints.

WHO ARE THE MAIN CONTENDERS IN ZAMBIA’S PRESIDENTIAL VOTE?

HILLARY ORINDE

An incumbent, two former ministers and a veteran journalist are among 14 candidates vying to become Zambia's next president in Thursday's election. But only two are widely seen as serious contenders for State House.

The 64-year-old, known as “HH”, won Zambia's top job in 2021 on his sixth attempt, unseating longtime rival Edgar Lungu in a landslide after years as the country's leading opposition figure.

He rode a wave of public anger over a struggling economy and took office with Zambia reeling from a sovereign debt default.

Hichilema is widely expected to win a second term after steering the copper-rich nation through a debt restructuring and economic recovery, although many Zambians say they have yet to feel the benefits as the high cost of living continues to bite. On the campaign trail, he embraced the youth catchphrase “Salt Sana” — or “more salt” — urging voters to “add more flavour” by re-electing him for a second and final five-year term.

A wealthy businessman, Hichilema has sought to soften his image by highlighting his humble roots, describing himself as a former “cattle boy”.

Born into a poor family in southern Zambia, he says he attended school barefoot before earning a scholarship to the University of Zambia, where he studied economics and business administration. He later completed an MBA at Britain's University of Birmingham. He went on to build a fortune with interests in finance, ranching, property, healthcare and tourism before taking over the leadership of the United Party for National Development (UPND) in 2006.

In 2017, he spent four months in a maximum-security prison on treason charges after allegedly refusing to give way to Lungu's presidential motorcade. The charges were later dropped.

Critics, including Human Rights Watch, say Hichilema has become increasingly intolerant of dissent, pointing to the treatment of opposition figures, journalists and activists. His government rejects the accusations.

A lawyer by profession, Mundubile emerged as Zambia's main opposition challenger after a fractured anti-government camp rallied around him through the Tonse Alliance, a coalition of opposition parties seeking to defeat Hichilema.

The 55-year-old was a close ally of the late Lungu and served as a minister under his administration. A veteran lawmaker for northern Zambia's Mporokoso constituency, Mundubile later became leader of the opposition in parliament after Lungu's Patriotic Front (PF) lost power. He has cast himself as a champion of ordinary Zambians struggling with high living costs, accusing Hichilema's government of focusing on economic reforms while failing to deliver relief to households. — AFP

Anger mounts in US over car licence plate cams



ULYSSE BELLIER

The writer is AFP journalist in Washington



A Flock camera is seen in the Los Angeles suburbs. — AFP file photo

IN ONLY a few years, the surveillance start-up Flock has installed more than 100,000 licence plate reader cameras across the United States.

But a grassroots movement upset over privacy concerns is fighting back — even going so far as systematically vandalising the equipment.

The first time he decided to trash one of the cameras, a self-styled vigilante wearing all black and known as Nomark says he was “super nervous”.

Now, after disabling about 30 of the devices near his home in the Minneapolis area, he said: “I'm not really as scared anymore”.

Flock cameras are installed by police departments, homeowners' associations and businesses, ostensibly to catch criminals in the act. Data is uploaded to Flock's cloud and can be shared with subscribers.

But opponents are outraged at what they say is a dangerous tool that can be used to infringe on American privacy and civil liberties.

At just 20 years old, Nomark offers his 500,000 Instagram followers a how-to guide for rendering the cameras useless, raising awareness about the devices.

His detractors point out — correctly — that his actions are illegal, but like-minded individuals have followed suit nationwide over the past few weeks. Instead of being dismissed as a radical fringe outfit, the anti-Flock movement is taking hold.

Its proponents have been active online for months, creating crowdsourced maps of cameras, sharing ways to block their lenses and hailing the ‘heroes’ who are arrested for destroying them.

The Facebook group DeFlock America has more than 600,000 members and is gaining thousands more by the day.

Flock cameras differ from traditional surveillance cameras in that they do not record video footage.

Instead they take still images of vehicles, capturing the make, model, colour, licence plate data and other distinguishing features such as bumper stickers.

Proponents have been active online for months, creating crowdsourced maps of cameras, sharing ways to block their lenses and hailing the ‘heroes’ who are arrested for destroying them

And unlike classic surveillance cameras, which are not networked, this data is stored for up to a month and shareable, sometimes across state lines.

Opponents say this gives police an overwhelming look into the private lives of law-abiding Americans.

Jon Bridges, a police official in Virginia's state capital Richmond, says that for “practically any crime that has a connection with a vehicle or a vehicle involved, we will at least query the database to see if there's anything there”.

His department has used Flock since 2023. Bridges gave an example of how useful the technology can be: during the investigation of a domestic-related double homicide in May, police quickly identified a suspect who fled the scene in his pick-up truck. Detectives retrieved his licence plate data and entered an alert in Flock's system. When he appeared on another camera, officers in a neighbouring county arrested him.

Detractors fear that this allows officers to track vehicles without warrants, opening the door to a host of possible abuses of power.

According to an investigation done by The Washington Post, at least 50 police officers have been accused of misusing the Flock system, most of them to spy on the comings and goings of their partners.

Some illegally sent data from the system to immigration agents.

Flock CEO Garrett Langley has accused some opponents of being “terrorists”, stoking the fire.

“There is really an incredible grassroots movement against Flock”, said Chad Marlow, senior policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union, calling its growth “stunning”.

The movement has support on both the political left and right, notably from libertarians.

Former Fox News host and conservative heavyweight Tucker Carlson has called the vandals “decent, patriotic Americans” who are simply “taking matters into their own hands”.

Across the country, local groups are pushing their lawmakers to step back from Flock.

Steven Keener, a professor of criminology at Christopher Newport University in Virginia, said residents can meet with city council members or mayors to convince them to cancel their contracts with the surveillance company.

So far, such grassroots efforts are proving successful.

From Los Angeles to small towns in Virginia, more than 70 municipalities have ended their association with Flock in recent months, according to an ACLU tally.

SPORTS

SEEB EXTEND WINNING RUN, SAHAM SUFFER FIRST DEFEAT



Al Nasr Club defeats Oman Club in the fifth round match of the Jindal Youth League competition.



Seeb defeats Bahla in the fifth week of the Jindal Youth League competitions

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

SEEB MAINTAINED their perfect record in the Jindal Youth League with a 5-1 victory over Bahla, while Al Shabab handed Group Two leaders Saham their first defeat as the fifth round produced important changes in the race for the semifinal places.

In Group One, Seeb extended their winning run to four matches after another convincing performance against Bahla. The leaders have collected a maximum 12 points, scoring 23 goals and conceding only two, giving them a three-point advantage at the top.

Al Nasr returned to winning ways with a 4-2 victory over Oman Club in one of the round's key encounters. The result moved Al Nasr to 10 points from five matches and into second place.

Sur also reached 10 points after defeating Samayil 3-1. Sur, however, have played only four matches and remain unbeaten with three victories and a draw, sitting third behind Al Nasr on goal difference.



Al Nasr Club defeats Oman Club in the fifth round match of the Jindal Youth League competition.

Oman Club dropped to fourth with nine points after suffering their second defeat, while Samayil remain on three points. Bahla and Dhofar are still searching for their first points. Group Two witnessed a major result as Al Shabab ended Saham's perfect start with a 2-1 victory. Saham remain top with nine points, but their advantage has been reduced significantly as the battle for the two semifinal places intensifies.

Al Shabab moved into second place with eight points and remain unbeaten after four matches, recording two victories and two draws.

Al Khabourah continued their recovery with a 3-0 victory over Al Nahda. Their second successive win lifted them to seven points and third place, just one point behind Al Shabab and two behind Saham.

Al Rustaq also moved on to seven points after edging Sohar 1-0, registering their second consecutive victory following a difficult start to the competition.

Ibri, who sat out the fifth round, remain on six points, while Sohar have five points after five matches. Al Nahda remain at the bottom without a point after four outings.

Oman enters intensive preparations for Asian Volleyball Championship

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

The national men's volleyball team will eye on the draw of the AVC Men's Continental Championship which will take place on Tuesday. The slot A1 (Pool A) will be headed by Japan as the host country while slot B1 (Pool B) will be Iran as the reigning runner-up, since Japan won the previous edition.

Oman team is currently under a busy schedule to gear up for the Asian event which is scheduled to take place in Fukuoka, Japan, from September 4 to 13. The Asian prestigious championship will serve as a qualifier for the LA 2028 Olympic Games, with the champion earning Asia's direct qualification berth to the Olympics. In addition, the top three teams will qualify

for the 2027 FIVB Volleyball Men's World Cup. The confirmed teams for the Asian event included: Japan, Iran, Qatar, South Korea, China, Australia, India, Chinese Taipei, New Zealand, Thailand and Sultanate of Oman.

Oman will enter the competition with renewed confidence following an impressive run of results during the current season. The national team captured the gold medal at the second West Asian Men's Volleyball Championship in Muscat last month, producing a memorable performance on home soil. Oman defeated Qatar 3-0 in the final at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex to claim the regional title.

Also, Oman finished ninth overall in the AVC Men's Volleyball Cup in Ahmedabad, India, in last June. The team had recorded a notable



Oman volleyball team during a match at the West Asian event

3-2 comeback victory over Qatar in the group stage. The team also had pushed South Korea to five sets before losing 3-2 and suffered a 3-1 defeat against Indonesia in another competitive encounter.

INTENSIVE PREPARATION
Oman head coach Nizar al

Shukaili from Tunisia said that the team entered an important phase of preparation as it targets peak readiness for the Asian championship. "We have embarked on a serious and intensive preparation phase in anticipation of competing in the Asian Volleyball Championship in Japan this September," Al Shukaili told Oman Observer.

"We are fully aware of the magnitude of the responsibility and the strength of the continental competition against the best teams in Asia.

However, we have great confidence in our national team players and their determination to deliver a performance that reflects the significant technical development Omani volleyball has witnessed," he added

FULL READINESS
Youssef al Badawi, Acting Secretary-General of the Oman Volleyball Association (OVA), said that the national team entered a closed training camp featuring intensive sessions designed to raise its readiness for the tournament. "We are working to provide everything necessary to support the players and prepare them for this highly anticipated continental competition," Al Badawi said.

He described the upcoming draw as an important milestone in the preparations. Al Badawi also highlighted the positive feedback received from officials of the Asian Volleyball Confederation and representatives of national federations regarding Oman's recent performances.

SHORT TAKES



Oman U-20 face Syria in final qualifier preparations

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

Oman’s national under-20 football team are stepping up preparations ahead of two international friendly matches against Syria as the young Red Warriors enter a decisive stage of their build-up for the AFC U20 Asian Cup China 2027 Qualifiers. With less than three weeks remaining before their opening qualifying match, head coach Hamad al Azzani and his technical staff are continuing the current domestic camp with the focus increasingly turning towards the two Syria encounters on August 13 and 16. The camp runs until August 17. The upcoming matches will provide Oman with an important opportunity to measure their progress under competitive conditions before the coaching staff move towards finalising preparations for the continental assignment.

Unlike the earlier stages of the programme, which were largely centred on assessing a wider pool of players and building the squad, the current phase comes much closer to the qualifiers and gives Al Azzani limited time to settle on his preferred combinations and ensure greater consistency in the team’s performance.

The technical staff have already worked with nearly 80 players since the preparation programme began in April before gradually reducing the group. Oman have completed several domestic and overseas camps during that period, while the current camp features a 26-player squad.

SYRIA ARRIVE AFTER BAHRAIN TESTS
Syria will provide Oman with another useful international test after completing two friendly matches against Bahrain in Manama.

The Syrian U20 side lost both encounters 1-0, with the first played on August 5 and the second on August 9. Syrian coach Arno Buitenweg used the matches to rotate his squad and assess the readiness and cohesion of his players, including several who are based with European clubs.

The Syrian side are also preparing for the AFC U20 qualifiers, where they will compete in Group B alongside hosts Uzbekistan, India and Bangladesh. Following the two matches against Oman, Syria are scheduled to continue their preparation programme with a camp in Qatar that will include a friendly against Saudi Arabia.

For Oman, the Syria double-header represents one of the final opportunities to test the team at international level before turning full attention to the qualifiers in Doha. The young Red Warriors will compete in Group E alongside hosts Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong, China. Oman begin their campaign against Qatar on August 31, followed by Saudi Arabia on September 3 and Hong Kong, China, on September 6. Qualification will be secured by the eight group winners and the seven best runners-up. With the qualifying campaign approaching, the remaining days of the camp and the two Syria matches will be crucial for Al Azzani.



The Oman national cricket team will take part with 15 players and four technical and administrative staff members

OMAN DELEGATION GEARS UP FOR JAPAN ASIAN GAMES 2026

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

OMAN OLYMPIC Committee (OOC) will participate in the 20th Asian Games “Aichi-Nagoya 2026,” to be held in Japan from September 19 to October 4, with Omani athletes competing in 10 sports: athletics, taekwondo, shooting, hockey, golf, fencing, cricket, weightlifting, sailing and beach volleyball.

Oman’s participation forms part of its continental sporting commitments, with the national teams aiming to deliver competitive performances that reflect their preparations and readiness for one of Asia’s biggest multi-sport events.

The Omani delegation will be headed by Mohammed bin Hamad al Rahbi, Chef de Mission, with Hanaa bint Said al Battashi serving as Deputy Chef de Mission.

The administrative team also includes Majid bin Khamis al Hinaï and Said bin Darwish al Jarjashi, Safeguarding Officer Salim bin Mohammed al Rawahi, team doctor Dr Afrah bint Hamoud al Jabri, physiotherapist Khalil bin Khalfan al Busaidi, journalist Waleed bin Zaher al Abri and photographer Haitham bin Salim Al Shukairi.

OOC is continuing preparations by completing the logistical and administrative requirements and ensuring appropriate arrangements for athletes and accompanying teams.

The national hockey team will



Hussein al Farsi’s coronation at the last Asian Games

compete from September 18 to October 3, with 10 players and eight technical and administrative staff members.

Oman’s shooting team will compete from September 20 to October 1 with six male and two female athletes, accompanied by four technical and administrative staff members.

The team will contest individual skeet, individual trap, 10m air pistol, 10m individual air rifle, 10m mixed air rifle, 50m three-position individual rifle and 25m pistol.

The beach volleyball team will compete from September 20 to October 3 with four players and one coach.

In fencing, four male and three female athletes will compete from September 22 to 27, supported by two technical and administrative staff members. Oman will contest individual and team foil as well as individual and team épée.

Three weightlifters, accompanied by two technical and administrative staff members, will compete from September 23

to 29 in the 75 kg, 85 kg and 95 kg categories.

Athletics will feature one of Oman’s largest squads, with eight male and three female athletes supported by six technical and administrative staff members from September 24 to 29. Oman will contest the 100m, 200m, men’s 4x100m relay, mixed 4x100m relay, high jump, long jump, triple jump and hammer throw.

The national cricket team will compete from September 24 to October 3 with 15 players and four technical and administrative staff members.

In sailing, four athletes and three technical and administrative staff members will take part from September 26 to October 3, with Oman competing in the 49er class.

The national golf team will compete from September 30 to October 3, represented by one player and one coach.

Oman’s programme will conclude with taekwondo from October 1 to 3, with one athlete competing in the -58 kg category accompanied by one coach.

The 20th Asian Games will be staged across venues in Aichi Prefecture and Nagoya, as well as selected venues outside the two main host areas.

The event marks the third time Japan has hosted the Asian Games, following Tokyo in 1958 and Hiroshima in 1994. Featuring 43 sports, the Games will bring together athletes from across Asia and provide Oman’s representatives with an important opportunity to compete at the highest continental level and gain valuable international experience.

Three-city Junior Hockey League to feature 21 matches

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

Ten clubs will compete in the 2026 Junior Hockey League, which gets under way on Friday and continues until August 31, with matches staged across Muscat, Sohar and Salalah.

Organised by the Oman Hockey Association, the tournament will feature 21 matches across three groups, with each group following a separate competition pathway and crowning its own champion.

Group 1 comprises Seeb, Al Amerat, Qurayat and Al Bashayer, while Group 2 includes Al Nahda, Al Musannah, Masirah and Al Suwaiq. Group 3 brings together Salalah and

Al Ittihad in a three-match series.

The competition will open at Hockey Oman Stadium on Friday, when Seeb face Al Bashayer at 6 pm before Al Amerat take on Qurayat at 8 pm. The remaining Group 1 preliminary matches will be played on August 18 and 21.

Following the single round-robin stage, the four clubs will move into the semifinals on August 23, with the group winners facing the fourth-placed side and the runners-up meeting the third-placed team. The two winners will contest the Group 1 final on August 26.

Group 2 will be staged at Sohar Sports Complex, beginning with Al Nahda against Al Suwaiq and



Young players battle for possession during a previous edition of the Junior Hockey League.

Al Musannah against Masirah. Its preliminary phase continues until August 23, followed by the semifinals on August 25 and 26 and the final on August 30.

In Salalah, Salalah Club and Al Ittihad will meet three times at the Salalah Cultural Complex.

Their opening encounter is scheduled for August 19, followed by further matches on August 25 and 31, with all three fixtures beginning at 5 pm.

The team collecting the most points across the three matches will claim the Group 3 title.

Under the competition regulations, teams will receive three points for a victory in regulation

time and no points for a regulation defeat. If a match is level at the end of normal time, each team will take three shoot-out attempts, with two points awarded to the shoot-out winner and one to the other side.

The champions of Groups 1 and 2 will each receive the championship trophy, 25 gold medals and a cash prize of RO 1,000, while the runners-up will receive 25 silver medals and RO 500. The Group 3 champions will collect the trophy, 25 gold medals and RO 500, with the runners-up earning 25 silver medals and RO 300.

Individual awards of RO 25 will also be presented to the best player, best goalkeeper and leading scorer in each host centre.



Ben Shelton (USA) hits a forehand against Joao Fonseca (BRA) during round of sixteen play at IGA Stadium. — **Imagn Images**

SHELTON SWEEPS FONSECA TO REACH ANOTHER MONTREAL QUARTERFINAL

DEFENDING

CHAMPION Ben Shelton kept a clean slate at the ATP Montreal Masters on Sunday, holding off a challenge from Joao Fonseca to power 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) into the quarterfinals.

World number 10 Shelton has not dropped a set in reaching the last eight. The 23-year old American left-hander will face the winner of a later match between Botic Van De Zandschulp and 13th seed Jakub Mensik.

Brazilian teenager Fonseca, billed as one of the faces for the future of the sport, might have compromised his own chances when he landed badly on his ankle after missing a smash while leading 3-1, 40-30 in the second set.

The youngster was plagued by 32 unforced errors as his opponent mastered an annoying evening wind to earn the victory.

“It was tough today, not easy conditions,” Shelton said. “With the wind I struggled to find footing on a lot of balls.

“It all came down to grit. The tennis was not clean. Beating a high-quality player like that is huge for me.”

Shelton secured his ninth straight victory in Canada on the second of four match points as Fonseca hit the net with a return after leading in both sets.

Daniel Merida smothered Tallon Griekspoor 6-3, 6-1 as the Spaniard continued his rapid adjustment to hardcourt tennis in Canada.

The world number 63 joins compatriot Rafael Jodar in the Canada quarterfinals and will break through to a career-best spot inside the top 50 as a result of his fourth-round victory.

Prior to making his Montreal debut, clay-courter Merida had never won a tour-level match on hardcourt.

He will try to extend his streak of cement success to five in a row when he plays a first Masters quarterfinal against US 12th seed Learner Tien, who wore down Argentine Thiago Tirante 6-4, 6-4.

Tien saved the first eight break points he faced in the second set in a battle of big hitters and secured victory in his fifth match point, with his opponent handing over the final game with four unforced errors.

“Today was humid, conditions are always tough,” Tien said. “I’m happy with how the match worked out.

“This was one of those days where I was making good contact with the ball. I was seeing the ball well and returning well.”

The 20-year-old added: “All the younger guys are playing with a lot of confidence. We’re playing free against the older guys.

“It’s great for the sport. The younger guys are also pushing each other.”

Against Griekspoor, Merida was deadly with his backhand, leaving the Dutchman flat-footed in the 69-minute triumph.

Spain’s title-winner last month on clay in Umag has now claimed 16 victories this breakthrough season.

“This is a dream come true. I’m feeling really great,” Merida said. “I’m happy with the level during all the week.

“I was playing great for the last year and the beginning of this year so I just starting to believe more in myself.” — **AFP**

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Oman regulates credit rating licensing

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

OMAN has introduced a regulatory framework governing credit rating activities as part of the newly issued Executive Regulations of the Securities Law, requiring credit rating providers operating in the Sultanate of Oman to obtain a licence from the Financial Services Authority (FSA), in a move expected to strengthen transparency and investor confidence as the country’s capital market expands.

Under Article 95 of the regulations, no credit rating activity may be conducted without an FSA licence. The rules define the activity broadly, covering assessments of the creditworthiness of companies, financial institutions and governments, as well as the credit risks associated with securities, debt instruments and structured finance products.

International credit rating agencies that do not maintain offices or branches in Oman and wish to provide services in the Sultanate of



The new framework comes as Oman seeks to broaden and deepen its capital market, with reliable independent assessments of credit risk potentially playing an important role in expanding debt-market activity

Oman are treated differently. Under Article 104, such agencies are exempt from establishing a local company or representative office or branch and from the licensing procedures, subject to a decision by the FSA Council identifying the eligible international agencies.

The new framework comes as Oman seeks to broaden and deepen its capital market, with reliable independent assessments of credit risk potentially playing an important role in expanding debt-market activity, facilitating investor due diligence and reducing

information asymmetries between issuers and investors.

Credit rating agencies may issue and publish ratings through various channels, including providing them to subscribers or clients for specified fees. The regulations stress that ratings constitute professional opinions on credit risk rather than direct investment recommendations.

Licensed agencies will be required to undertake comprehensive analysis of financial and economic information and relevant macroeconomic factors, including financial performance, capital structure, liquidity and leverage. They must also provide reports and information on issuers’ creditworthiness to support investment decisions and enhance market transparency.

The regulations set a minimum proposed capital of RO 2 million (\$5.2 million) for companies seeking a credit-rating licence and require licensed agencies to be entered in a dedicated register maintained by the FSA.

For locally licensed agencies, the regulations impose detailed

standards intended to protect the integrity and independence of ratings.

Agencies must ensure adequate resources and information, use systematic methodologies, avoid misleading assessments, protect confidential information and maintain independence and objectivity. They must also establish mechanisms to prevent conflicts of interest and ensure analysts have appropriate professional qualifications and experience. Managers and senior analysts must have at least five years’ practical experience in the financial sector, while licensed agencies must establish a professional affiliation with a reputable global rating agency with at least 10 years’ experience.

The new framework provides a clearer regulatory foundation for credit-rating activity in Oman, potentially supporting the development of a more sophisticated debt market and helping attract institutional and international investors seeking greater transparency and comparability in assessing credit risk.

Labour Ministry steps up market inspections, employment drive



A total of 11,172 non-Omani workers were found to be in violation of labour regulations during the first half of this year.

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

The Ministry of Labour intensified its efforts to regulate the labour market during the first half of 2026 by increasing inspections, updating legislative frameworks, and supporting employment, localisation and training.

This initiative aims to enhance labour market efficiency and strengthen the stability of the business environment.

The results of the Ministry’s inspections during the first half of the year recorded 6,707 inspection visits, with a compliance rate of 69.5 per cent.

The number of non-Omani workers found to be in violation of the regulations reached 11,172. The monitoring measures also resulted in 4,680 referrals to the Public Prosecution and 2,944 deportations. Additionally, 272 job opportunities were registered under the

reconciliation decision, reflecting the Ministry’s continued commitment to rigorously monitoring compliance with labour market regulations.

On the legislative front, the Ministry continued to develop the legal framework governing labour by issuing Ministerial Decision No 44/2026, amending certain provisions of the Regulations for Work Permits and Business Practice Licenses. This aims to streamline licensing procedures and enhance the efficiency of the labour market.

In July 2026, the Ministry also issued Ministerial Decision No 284/2026 on the system for forming, operating and registering trade unions, sectoral general unions and the General Federation of Workers of the Sultanate of Oman.

This step strengthens the regulatory framework for labour relations and supports dialogue among

the parties involved in the production process.

These regulatory and legislative measures coincided with the Ministry’s efforts to support employment, training and Omanisation.

During the first half of the year, more than 34,000 opportunities were registered in the areas of employment, Omanisation and on-the-job training, aligning with national employment targets and promoting the participation of Omanis in the labour market.

These indicators point to an integrated approach towards regulating the labour market through three main areas: monitoring and inspection, developing legislation and supporting employment and training, which enhances the balance between the needs of private sector establishments and the aspirations of job seekers and raises the competitiveness of the business environment in Oman.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tender:-

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (ر.ع.)
NESC/ 2026/027-2	Social Media Monitoring System	17/08/2026	24/08/2026	Specialist	26.250
NESC/ 2026/018-2	Renewal of Tenable Security Center license for a period of one year	17/08/2026	24/08/2026	Specialist	26.250
The table below shows the instructions for participation: -					
Participation	• Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain Tender documents. • The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. • The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply). • To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please visit www.supply.nama.om , under NESC VENDOR / E-Tender.				
Enquiries	• Any inquiry can be sent to procurement@supply.nama.om , using the inquiry form found in the tender document (05) Five working days before bid submission date. • Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.				
Tender Submission	• Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER and supplier guidelines available at NESC Website www.supply.nama.om , under NESC VENDOR / E-Tender.				
Guarantee	• The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of not less than Ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF PROCUREMENT COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. • The hard copy of the bid bond should be deposited in the Tender Box at the Nama Electricity Supply Company Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 10:00 AM on the day specified for bid submission or any extended deadline. • Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected. • If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date.				
Terms and Conditions	• The Tender shall be valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. • NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. • A certificate confirming Omanization achievement, bidder who fails to submit this certificate will result in exclusion from the tender evaluation process. • Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization. • NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. • Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.				
Incentives and exemptions	• Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees • Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. • Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from registration fees on business opportunities platform and supplier registration with Nama Group.				

BUSINESS FEATURE

E - c o m m e r c e i n O m a n



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

IN OMAN, the question is no longer whether consumers will buy online, but rather to what extent e-commerce will become a natural part of daily economic life.

In just a few years, Omani e-commerce has transformed from a limited activity practiced by a handful of stores and platforms into a rapidly expanding market, intertwined with digital payments, logistics, e-marketing, entrepreneurship, SMEs and even the state’s economic policy.

In an interview with the Observer, Rashid bin Abdullah al Shidhani, an economic researcher and analyst, stated that the role of e-commerce in the national economy is growing and complementary to other economic sectors, both the oil and non-oil.

He emphasised that e-commerce is a fundamental and crucial driver in supporting SMEs by reducing their operating costs and generating logistics-related job opportunities for job seekers, thus contributing to the development of a service-based economy that supports Oman’s national economic system.

Al Shidhani also mentioned that the development of digital infrastructure and its application in financial payments will contribute to attracting more foreign investment into the technology sector in the Sultanate of Oman. However, he stressed the need to expand the Omani market to enable the e-commerce sector to achieve genuine growth through the electronic export of digital raw materials, rather than simply selling products and providing services online.

Al Shidhani added that artificial intelligence will transform e-commerce in the coming years, shifting it from a store that simply displays products to one that understands your needs by modifying algorithms to recognise consumer requirements. He pointed out that AI plays a crucial role in developing e-commerce and is an important factor in raising community awareness and helping combat cyberattacks, particularly those involving suspicious links.

What is noteworthy about the Omani experience is that the growth of e-commerce is no longer measured solely by the number of online stores, but rather by an integrated economic system encompassing licensing, payments, logistics, digital marketing, consumer protection, finance, data and cybersecurity.

Official indicators suggest that e-commerce in the Sultanate of Oman has made significant strides in recent years. According to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the number of e-commerce licenses reached 19,366 as of August 2026. The Ministry also noted that the direct regulatory framework for e-commerce was significantly strengthened with the issuance of the E-Commerce Regulations under Ministerial Decision No 499/2023.

As of August of this year, Ministry data shows that the number of active e-commerce licenses has reached 10,454, in addition to 3,243 licenses for marketing and promotion activities via social media platforms. This reflects the expanding base of businesses that have come to rely on the internet and social media as effective channels for sales, marketing and reaching consumers.

Electronic payments: The clearest indicator of changing consumer behaviour

While the number of stores and licenses measures the supply side, electronic payments provide a clearer picture of the shift in demand and consumer behaviour. Transactions through local electronic payment gateways reached approximately RO 3.2 billion in 2025, marking a 76.3 per cent increase compared to 2024. While these figures do not represent the entirety of payments, as digital payments encompass various commercial and service activities, they do provide a significant indicator of the expanding infrastructure necessary for digital commerce and the Omani consumer’s readiness to utilise cashless channels.

Despite the substantial growth in infrastructure, licensing and payment methods, consumer trust remains the most critical factor in the development of e-commerce.

In a traditional store, consumers can see the product, locate the seller and contact them if a problem arises. However, in the online environment, purchasing decisions are more heavily reliant on

trust in the seller’s identity, product quality, price transparency, payment methods, return policies, data protection and delivery speed.

Therefore, the Ministry has focused on developing regulatory and digital tools aimed at bridging the trust gap between consumers and online stores.

One of the most prominent of these tools is the “Maroof Oman” platform, which aims to verify licensed online stores, enabling consumers to check the legal status and information of the store, as well as facilitating feedback and communication between consumers and stores.

As of August, the platform had registered 416 online stores, while the number of verification requests reached 794. This step is of economic importance that extends beyond the regulatory aspect, as it helps transform trust from a personal relationship between seller and buyer to institutional trust based on licensing, verification and transparency.

MOVING FROM REGULATION TO MARKET BUILDING

Over the past years, the Ministry has issued a wide range of decisions and regulations governing commercial activities, including e-commerce, marketing and promotion through websites and social media, as well as other activities related to the digital economy.

The e-commerce regulatory framework issued by Ministerial Decision No 499/2023 represents an important step in defining the framework within which sellers operate through websites and social media.

Nasra bint Sultan al Habsi, Director-General of Commerce at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), stated that e-commerce is one of the sectors most closely linked to continuous technological advancements. She added that the key to enforcing the law is not the platform used for sales, but whether the activity is a commercial activity subject to licensing and regulatory requirements. Using social media does not exempt the business owner from legal and regulatory obligations.

The Ministry indicates that the completion rate of the National E-Commerce Plan reached 86.7 per cent in 2025, following the completion of 26 out of 30 initiatives within the framework of government efforts to develop the digital business environment, with the goal of reaching 100 per cent completion by 2027. These figures indicate that the Sultanate has moved from the foundational stage to a more advanced stage of completing the system.

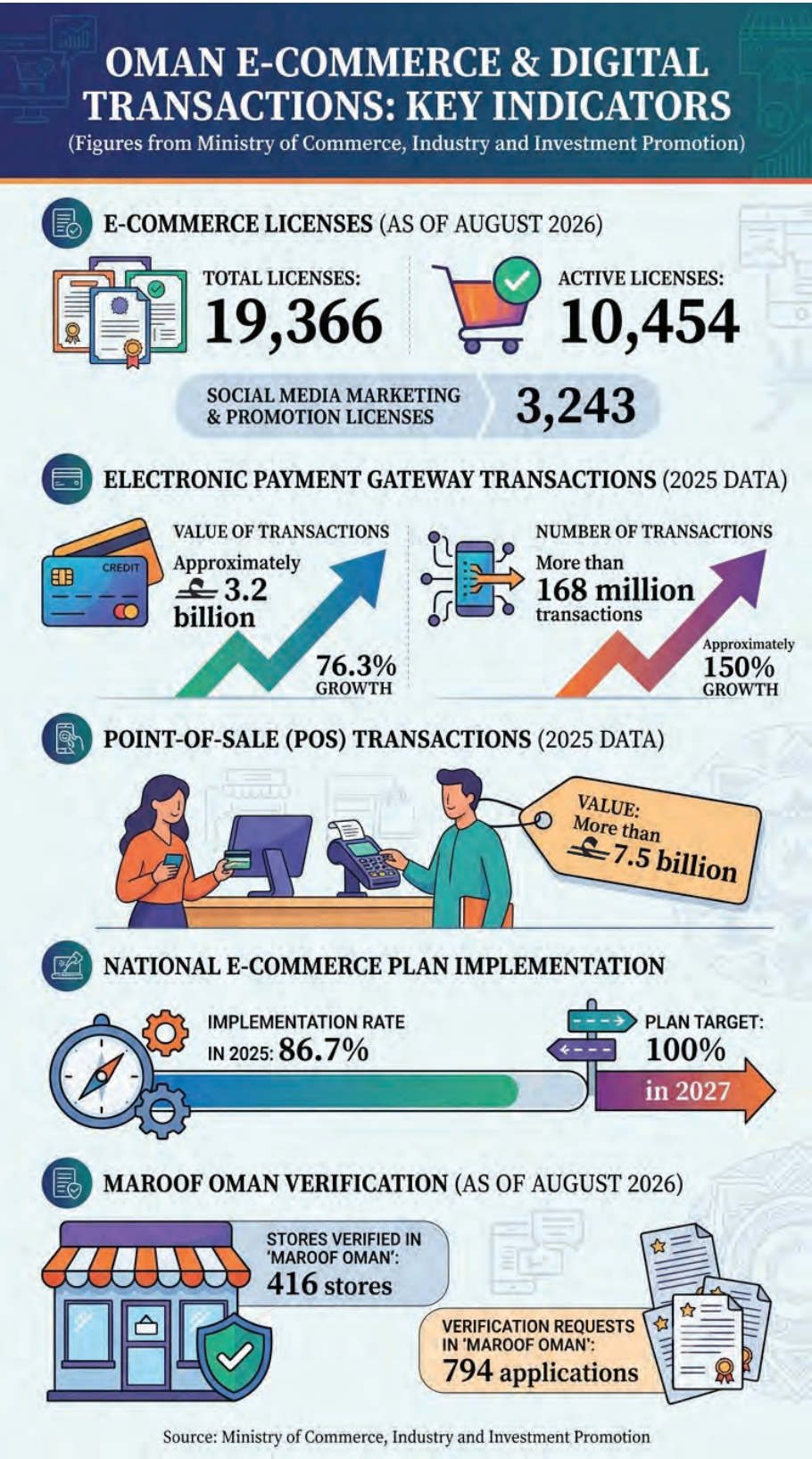
It is a mistake to view e-commerce as merely a new way to sell clothes, appliances, or food. Its impact extends to multiple economic sectors, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). SMEs are perhaps the biggest beneficiaries of e-commerce. Instead of needing a physical store in an expensive location, entrepreneurs can start their businesses online with less investment. This lowers barriers to entry and opens the door for home-based and small businesses to reach a wider audience. However, the reduced cost of entry also increases competition. This means that while e-commerce offers a greater opportunity, it doesn’t guarantee success.

If Oman succeeds in building this model, e-commerce could transform from a consumer tool to an export tool, a shift that is economically crucial.

Available indicators show that Oman has moved beyond simply proving the importance of e-commerce and has entered a more critical phase: maximising its economic returns.

The increasing number of e-commerce licenses, the significant growth in digital payments, the expansion of government platforms, the high level of implementation of the National E-Commerce Plan, the development of the “Maroof Oman” platform and the modernisation of legislation all point to the formation of a more mature digital commerce ecosystem.

But the true test for the next phase will not be the number of online stores, but their ability to create added value, provide jobs, empower SMEs, increase exports and enhance the competitiveness of the Omani economy. The period from now until 2030 will be crucial in determining whether the Sultanate of Oman will be content with being a digital consumer market, or will become a regional hub capable of producing and exporting value through digital trade.



SHORTTAKE

طاقة عُمان
ENERGY OMAN

ENERGY OMAN
LAUNCHES NEW
CORPORATE
IDENTITY

MUSCAT: Energy Oman has officially announced the launch of its new corporate identity, a strategic step reflecting the company’s continuous growth, adaptation to global shifts and strengthened presence within the economic ecosystem, embodying its commitment to steering and leading the transition toward a sustainable future for Oman’s energy sector.

The launch of the new identity aligns with the national mandate assigned to the company under Royal Decree No 128/2020. This mandate aims to manage and develop national resources, improve sector management efficiency, direct investments that boost financial and economic returns and support local content as well as the sustainability of the oil, gas and renewable energy sectors.

Energy Oman’s new identity solidifies the company’s role in directing and leading the energy transition, translating its vision toward guiding and enhancing the sector’s efficiency to directly support the national economy. It reinforces trust through performance and results, in alignment with the pillars of Oman Vision 2040 to achieve economic diversification and build an economy grounded in knowledge as well as financial sustainability.

Commenting on this occasion, Eng Mazin bin Rashid al Lamki, Chief Executive Officer of Energy Oman, stated: “At Energy Oman, we work to guide and enhance the Sultanate’s energy sector. This step represents a qualitative shift in how we showcase our corporate identity and reflect our presence both locally and internationally.”

He added: “We rely on an approach centred on discovering opportunities, establishing robust governance and responsibility and shaping best practices. Energy Oman continues to operate with high efficiency and international standards to build trust through results, creating a self-sustaining economic engine that contributes to Oman’s prosperity and safeguards the rights of future generations.”

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 10

Tuhlub Al Mustadama, an Omani start-up and member of the Zubair Enterprise Development Centre (Zubair EDC), has signed a cooperation agreement with Simak to implement a pilot project for fish feed production. The agreement was signed by Zahir al Alawi, Founder of Tuhlub Al Mustadama and Abdulaziz al Yaqoubi, Supply Chain Manager on behalf of Simak.

The agreement marks an important milestone for Tuhlub Al Mustadama, an innovative company focused on the green economy and environmental sustainability. The company harnesses locally available algae and seaweed resources to develop high-quality aquaculture feed, contributing to food security and the development of Oman’s blue economy.

CURRENCY MARKETS

Dollar steadies after payrolls drop



The US dollar steadied at a near two-month low on Monday following Friday’s soft jobs data, as investors awaited this week’s inflation data for more clues on the Federal Reserve’s rate path. The futures market scaled back the chance of a September move to around 44 per cent from 67 per cent a week ago. US Treasury yields also largely maintained their declines after the jobs report dashed hike bets, with those on benchmark US 10-year notes last at 4.647 per cent. — Reuters

GLOBAL MARKETS

Asia stocks firm, oil edges up



Asian share markets tracked Wall Street higher on Monday after a soft US jobs report pared the risk of a near-term rise in borrowing costs, though a lack of progress in Gulf peace talks saw oil prices creep higher. Brent crude added 0.6 per cent to \$84.04 a barrel as shipping through the vital waterway remained at a trickle, while US crude rose 0.5 per cent to \$78.56 a barrel. — Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold steadies at seven-week peak



Gold held steady on Monday after prices hit a seven-week high in the previous session, while markets looked to US inflation data for fresh clues on the Federal Reserve’s interest rate path. Spot gold was little changed at \$4,346.85 per ounce, as of 0637 GMT. Prices hit their highest since June 17 on Friday after weak US non-farm payrolls data. — Reuters

Mobile subscriptions in
Oman reach 8.32 million

THE total number of mobile telecommunications subscriptions in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 1.3 per cent at the end of June 2026 compared with the end of June 2025, reaching 8,324,406 subscriptions, compared to the end of June 2025, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The data showed that the active post-paid mobile subscriptions rose by 6.2 per cent to 1,313,837 subscriptions, while active prepaid mobile subscriptions declined by 2.1 per cent to 5,305,401 subscriptions.

Subscriptions to Internet of Things (IoT) machine-to-machine (M2M) services recorded a 9.3 per cent increase, reaching 1,705,168 subscriptions by the end of June 2026.

In the internet services segment, the total number of active mobile broadband subscriptions recorded a



slight increase of 0.3 per cent, reaching 5,534,086 subscriptions. Meanwhile, total active fixed broadband subscriptions stood at 591,630, up by 0.5 per cent compared to the end of June 2025.

Regarding fixed broadband

technologies, Fiber-to-the-Home/Building (FTTH/B) subscriptions increased by 7.4 per cent, reaching 364,487 subscriptions by the end of June 2026.

In contrast, fixed 5G subscriptions declined by 2.5 per cent to 210,125 subscriptions, while fixed 4G subscriptions fell sharply by 73 per cent to 5,666 subscriptions.

Subscriptions to Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) services decreased by 20.9 per cent to 8,933 subscriptions. Meanwhile, satellite broadband subscriptions recorded the highest growth rate among fixed internet technologies, surging by 134.3 per cent to 1,696 subscriptions.

The total number of active fixed-line telephone subscriptions also increased by 0.2 per cent, reaching 439,829 subscriptions by the end of June 2026.

International internet bandwidth expanded by 31.8 per cent, reaching 5.382 million Mbps by the end of June 2026.

— ONA

OIL
RISES ON
UNCERTAINTY
OVER
REOPENING OF
HORMUZ

SINGAPORE: Oil prices increased today on uncertainty over the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz. Brent crude futures rose 91 cents or 1.09 per cent, to \$84.46 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures rose 61 cents or 0.78 per cent to \$78.79 a barrel. Both benchmarks had fallen more than 7 per cent last week on hopes that Iran and Oman were nearing an agreement that would lead to the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, through which one-fifth of the world’s oil passed before the war.

— ONA



Omani start-up, Simak launch fish feed pilot project



The pilot project will leverage Simak’s infrastructure and industrial expertise in the Special Economic Zone at Al Duqm to support the development and production of locally sourced, sustainable solutions that address the evolving needs of the aquaculture sector.

Commenting on the agreement, Zahir al Alawi, Founder of Tuhlub Al Mustadama, said: “This agreement with Simak marks a significant milestone for Tuhlub Al Mustadama, taking our sustainable fish feed project from research and development into

pilot implementation and paving the way for an Omani product with the potential for commercial-scale production. Through this collaboration, we aim to develop feed using locally available resources, supporting food security while enhancing the competitiveness of

Oman’s aquaculture sector and blue economy.”

The pilot project aims to demonstrate the product’s efficiency, consistency and potential for industrial-scale production by combining the operational and technical capabilities of both parties. Simak will provide the production environment, operational services and available raw materials, while Tuhlub Al Mustadama will oversee the technical aspects of the project, including feed formulation, nutritional analysis, production supervision and testing.

Ali Shaker, Head of ESG & Sustainability at The Zubair Corporation, said: “We are proud of the achievements of Zubair EDC’s members, which demonstrate the importance of empowering Omani entrepreneurs and supporting them in transforming innovative ideas into scalable businesses.”

OPINION

Why some IT training fails to deliver real value?



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

THE writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker.

Have you ever wondered why do some organisations invest heavily in IT training, yet see very little change in the performance of their employees? My article this week will aim to answer this question based on a practical experience via my engagements with different institutions, be it academic, private companies and/or some of the government agencies. Hopefully by the end of the article, you would have a better idea for what organizations should probably avoid and consider in order not to spend significant time and money sending employees to courses, workshops and certification programmes that doesn't produce real-world experience.

Imagine two organisations trying to strengthen their IT capabilities. The first identifies a popular IT course, registers ten employees and sends them for training. They attend the sessions, complete the exercises, receive their certificates and return to work. Everyone is happy (employees mostly), and training target achieved (HR and senior management mostly). But then reality catches up. The employees return to their desks and discover that the technology they learned is being used differently in their organisation. The systems are different. The architecture is different. The codebase is different. Even the way the technology is applied to the business is different. Sound familiar? Did the training really prepare them for the job or just gave

them days off from work and handed them certificate as proof attendance?

Now imagine another organisation taking a different approach. Instead of asking, "Which course should we send our employees to?" it asks, "What do we actually need our employees to be able to do?" The training is then designed around the organisation's technology stack, systems, products, codebase and business requirements. This is the difference between generic training and customised training.

Generic training certainly has its place. It can provide employees with a foundation and expose them to new technologies and concepts. But in IT, where organisations often operate highly specialised systems, generic training can sometimes stop at knowledge without translating that knowledge into performance.

Customised training however takes a different route. The learning is connected to the environment in which employees will actually work.

One of the academy's model that I am associated with (Introduct) trains people on the customer's technology stack and codebase, incorporating specific technologies, approaches and products into the curriculum. What impressed me about its Academy model is the thinking behind it.

Rather than treating training as a standard course that an organisation simply sends employees to attend, the approach can be built around the customer's actual technology environment. The objective is not simply to teach someone Java, JavaScript or

another technology, but to prepare them to work within a specific organisation's systems and requirements.

The customer examples make the concept even more interesting. One Estonian IT company had six individuals move from their existing technology backgrounds into Elixir programming. Their training included practical, hands-on work on real-world initiatives. After completing the programme, they integrated into the company's team and began contributing value. Another organisation needed developers for a complex industrial billing system built on Java and JavaScript. Four graduates joined the project, quickly understood its domain-specific requirements and contributed to new billing modules and data-processing improvements.

They eventually became permanent members of the engineering team. These examples made me look differently at the word "training".

Training should not simply be about transferring knowledge from a trainer to an employee. It should ultimately help an organisation solve its problems. For IT leaders, perhaps the more important question is not, "How many employees did we train this year?" It should be: "How much better can our employees perform because of the training they received?" Because a certificate can prove that someone completed training. Only performance can prove that the training worked. Trust me. Until we catch up again next week, build your team capabilities, and don't just train generally.

Training should not simply be about transferring knowledge from a trainer to a trainee. It should ultimately help an organisation solve its problems.

CHINA IS BALANCING ASIA'S CRUDE OIL DEMAND BY ITSELF

China is singlehandedly doing the heavy lifting of cutting crude oil demand in Asia to compensate for reduced shipments from the Middle East as a result of the Iran war.

The world's biggest oil importer reported arrivals of 8.41 million barrels per day (bpd) in July, up from the near decade low of 7.12 million in June but still 24.3% below July last year.

If June and July imports are combined, it gives an average of 7.78 million bpd for the past two months. This is 4.21 million bpd below the average of 11.99 million bpd in the three months to the end of February.



CLYDE RUSSELL

The writer is an Asia Commodities and Energy Columnist at Reuters

The United States and Israel attacked Iran on February 28, with the conflict escalating to the point where the Strait of Hormuz was effectively closed, cutting off a waterway through which about 20% of the world's crude oil and refined products moved prior to the start of the war.

Two of the Middle East's crude exporters, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have managed to boost shipments from ports outside the Strait of Hormuz, but flows from the region have still been knocked lower by around 5 million bpd.

The bulk of crude exports from the Middle East head to Asia, the top-importing region, which has seen crude arrivals drop substantially.

Asia's total oil imports in July were 22.82 million bpd, according to data compiled by commodity analysts Kpler.

While this was up from April's 18.77 million bpd, which was the lowest since November 2015, July's imports were still down about 4 million bpd from the average of 26.89 million bpd in the three months prior to the start of the Iran conflict.

What the data show is that the loss of imports by Asia is about equal to the drop in imports by China for the past two months.

Part of China's reduced imports will be because of price volatility, with benchmark Brent futures hitting a four-year high of \$126.41 a barrel on April 30, a time when June and July cargoes would have been arranged.

China has a track record of cutting back on imports when prices rise, but the scale of the drop has been unprecedented.

There is little doubt China has the ability to sustain lower imports for an extended period, given its vast crude stockpile, which is estimated by analysts to be at least 1.2 billion barrels strong and may even be substantially higher. — Reuters

Fence, bloc, and future: Oman's 2026 choice

EVERY country, large or small, is in survival mode today. I say this not as rhetoric but as an observation from the data on my desk. The International Monetary Fund's April 2026 World Economic Outlook tellingly subtitled "Global Economy in the Shadow of War" expects global growth to slow to 3.1 per cent this year, well below pre-pandemic averages, with risks that the Fund describes as decisively on the downside. Behind that dry number sit very human realities: a family in Nairobi paying more for wheat, a shopkeeper in Rotterdam waiting an extra fortnight for stock, a young engineer in Muscat wondering what kind of world she is graduating into. Energy corridors the world took for granted for half a century have become question marks. The Strait of Hormuz, which normally carries about one-fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas according to the US Energy Information Administration, has faced its most serious disruption in living memory, while Red Sea traffic remains structurally below pre-2023 levels, pushing vessels around the Cape of Good Hope and adding ten to fourteen days to every voyage. Freight, food and fuel carry the bill; ordinary consumers everywhere pay it.

In such a world, an old question returns with new urgency. Must every nation now choose a bloc? The multilateral order that powered the post-1990 boom is fragmenting into overlapping spheres: an American-led bloc, a Chinese economic orbit, a Russian sphere and regional alignments orbiting them each quietly demanding loyalty in trade, technology and finance. The IMF has warned repeatedly that this geo-economic fragmentation could shave several percentage points off global output over the long run and that small open economies would feel it most. For a superpower,



DR YOUSUF HAMED AL BALUSHI

yousufh@omaninvestgateway.com

The writer is founder and CEO, Smart Investment Gateway, economist, board adviser & business transformation mentor.

Analysts like to call Oman the Switzerland of the Gulf and the comparison, if anything, flatters Switzerland; the Alps were never a chokepoint carrying a fifth of the world's oil

choosing a side is strategy. For a small trading nation, it can be closer to amputation: commit to one bloc and you risk forfeiting the markets, capital and technology of all the others. Which raises the first hard question I want to put to the reader: is sitting on the fence a weakness, or has it quietly become the scarcest strategic asset in the world economy?

Oman has never treated neutrality as indecision. It is a doctrine, refined patiently over five decades: a friend to all, an adversary to none. Muscat kept channels open when others closed them, hosting quiet conversations from early American-Iranian contacts more than a decade ago to sustained engagement on Yemen that few other capitals could credibly convene. Analysts like to call Oman the Switzerland of the Gulf and the comparison, if anything, flatters Switzerland; the Alps were never a chokepoint carrying a fifth of the world's oil. Geography reinforces the doctrine. Salalah on the Arabian Sea, Al Duqm on the Indian Ocean and Suhar at the mouth of the Gulf sit largely outside the most contested waters, which means that when conventional corridors seize up, Oman is not a bystander to rerouted trade but a natural harbour for it and, more importantly, a natural stabiliser.

Still, honesty demands a second question: can Oman afford the fence in 2026? Joining a bloc promises security guarantees and preferential capital. But the other side of the ledger is longer. Neutrality is precisely what makes Oman investable to everyone at once Asian manufacturers, Gulf sovereign funds, Western energy majors, African trading partners. To trade that away would leave Oman as one more mid-sized aligned economy; to preserve it keeps Oman something genuinely rare: trusted ground. The markets appear to agree. All three major agencies now

rate Oman investment grade S&P restored BBB- in September 2024, Moody's followed with Baa3 in July 2025 and Fitch completed the set citing public debt reduced to 35.5 per cent of GDP, a budget surplus and disciplined spending. Even amid this year's regional turbulence, S&P reaffirmed the rating in March 2026, noting government liquid assets above 40 per cent of GDP. Few emerging economies walk into a storm carrying buffers like these.

And the storm, paradoxically, brings opportunity. The blue economy and fisheries along more than 3,000 kilometres of coastline; logistics corridors, as global supply chains diversify away from single chokepoints; mining, where Oman Vision 2040 aims to lift the sector's contribution from 1.4 per cent of GDP towards 10 per cent; tourism; and green hydrogen, where Oman's ambitions are among the world's most credible. Each converts turbulence into throughput and each aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals. Yet a third question must be asked, gently but firmly: who will actually capture these opportunities? In every thriving economy, the answer is the small and medium enterprise. SMEs represent as many as 99 per cent of all firms across OECD economies and generate half or more of national output and the World Bank counts them as the source of most jobs worldwide.

In Oman they contribute roughly RO 9.2 billion about, 21.8 per cent of GDP, according to the SME Development Authority a share that is rising, yet still well short of that benchmark. Three gaps hold the sector back.

The first is scale: our SMEs remain small, in both number and size, relative to the opportunity in front of them. The second is capability: many lack the readiness in finance, skills, management and market access to plug into global value chains.

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A child plays football next to a marble bust Homer on Ithaca. — AFP

Standing on a ferry waiting to dock on the Greek island of Ithaca, Giorgia Ongarato eagerly discussed the “Odyssey”, the epic poem that inspired Christopher Nolan’s blockbuster film.

The Italian lawyer said visiting Ithaca, widely believed to be the home of Odysseus in Homer’s poem, had long been her dream.

“I studied Greek when I was a child and I studied the Odyssey”, said the 50-year-old, wearing a T-shirt bearing the poem’s title in ancient Greek.

While the film did not introduce her to the hero’s journey home from the Trojan War, she described it as “wonderful”.

Businesses and officials on Ithaca hope the film will encourage more visitors to follow in her footsteps. Located in the Ionian Sea off mainland Greece’s western coast, Ithaca lies far from the country’s main tourist hubs. Despite its clear waters, spectacular bays and rugged interior covered with olive and cypress trees, it has never been a regular stop for international travellers.

The film has generated excitement but also disappointment. Although several Greek locations were used, no scenes were filmed on Ithaca.

The island, home to around 3,000 people, has hosted two open-air screenings since the film’s worldwide release on July 16.

Xhimi Xoxha, who runs a restaurant in the capital, Vathi, said the film was already “generating publicity for the island”.

Mayor Dionysis Stanitsas agreed the publicity had been “tremendous” but regretted that Ithaca did not appear. “We had reached out to the production team and asked that some scenes be filmed here on the island”, he said. “Unfortunately, that wasn’t feasible”.

The island was already fully booked for the current season when the film was released, but Stanitsas expects demand to rise next year.

“As more people see it, they will begin planning trips to visit the island”, he said.

Visitors will not find a palace belonging to Odysseus or a major archaeological site confirming the Homeric hero’s existence. Nevertheless, reminders of Ithaca’s literary heritage are everywhere.

Statues of Odysseus and Homer stand in village squares and outside the town hall. Boats in the port bear names such as Telemachus and Calypso, while shops sell busts of Homer and Penelope, T-shirts depicting the Cyclops Polyphemus and ornaments featuring the Trojan Horse.

Nearby, holidaymakers relax beneath parasols at Dexia beach, where legend says Odysseus landed after years of voyaging.

Archaeologist Spyros Couvaras expects an increase in visitors seeking more than beaches. The “driving force” behind the renewed interest is undoubtedly the movie, he said.

“But behind Nolan’s film stands Homer”. — AFP

Q U I C K F E A T U R E S



RAIN

People dance with umbrellas on a climate-controlled “rainy street” at the voco Monaco Dubai resort in Dubai. — Reuters



FAITH

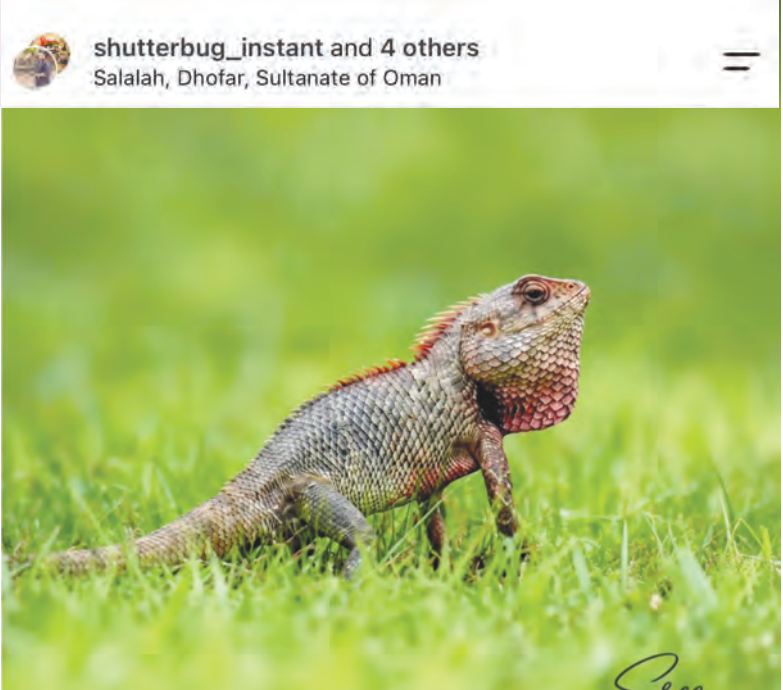
Pilgrims dressed in traditional dance costumes arrive for the mass at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico. — Reuters



FESTIVAL

Traditional dancers in a festival marking the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples in San Salvador, El Salvador. — Reuters

INSTA PICKS



“Not every king wears a crown — some rule the wild”



“Cacti in Salalah”

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WHITNEY HOUSTON
HONOURED WITH
BARBIE DOLL

Barbie has honoured the late Whitney Houston with a doll celebrating her musical legacy and unmistakable style.

Houston joins stars including David Bowie and Diana Ross who have been immortalised as part of the Barbie Signature Series.

The doll recreates Houston’s look from the music video for “I Wanna Dance With Somebody (Who Loves Me)”. It wears a pink bodycon midi dress, colourful earrings and white-and-blue heels, complete with the singer’s signature 1980s fringe and long, curly hair.

Unveiled nearly four decades after the song’s release and in celebration of Houston’s birthday, the doll pays tribute to her influence on music, entertainment and popular culture.



The doll recreates Houston’s look from the music video for “I Wanna Dance With Somebody (Who Loves Me)”. — **dpa**

Nathan Baynard, vice-president and head of Barbie at Mattel, said: “Whitney Houston’s music has been the soundtrack to countless moments for fans around the world.

“Barbie is proud to honour her extraordinary legacy with the latest addition to the Barbie Signature Series.

“This doll celebrates her unmistakable style, joy and spirit. We hope it gives fans a meaningful way to celebrate the artist whose voice and influence continue to resonate around the world”.

The doll was unveiled during the fifth annual Whitney Houston Legacy of Love Gala,

which raises funds for the late singer’s foundation and its work supporting young people.

Houston joins several musicians previously honoured by the Barbie Signature Series, including Miley Cyrus, Kylie Minogue, Stevie Nicks, Gloria Estefan, Tina Turner, Elvis Presley, Elton John and Juan Gabriel.

Houston became one of the best-selling artists in pop history after signing a recording contract as a teenager. Her hits included “How Will I Know”, “Saving All My Love for You” and her chart-topping rendition of “I Will Always Love You”.

She died in 2012 at the age of 48. — **dpa**



Hasan Seker, a 56-year-old who co-founded Bosphorus Cymbals, poses at a traditional workshop in Istanbul. — **AFP**

ISTANBUL’S
CENTURIES-OLD CYMBAL TRADITION

THE rhythmic clang of hammers echoes through an Istanbul workshop as three craftsmen transform featureless bronze discs into prized handmade cymbals.

First used by Ottoman military “mehter” bands to frighten and demoralise enemies, cymbals were later transformed by 17th-century Armenian alchemist Avedis Zildjian.

Although cymbals existed before him, Zildjian developed a unique alloy and metal-treatment process that made them less fragile. His achievement won recognition from the Ottoman sultan in 1623 and permission to establish a workshop.

“It’s really hard to make good cymbals because they’re consistently being crashed, so to make something that wasn’t brittle which could withstand continuous use is quite an achievement”, said ethnomusicologist Audrey Wozniak.

The secret passed through generations. Although the original Zildjian operation moved to the United States during the final years of the Ottoman Empire, craftsmen trained by its masters continued the tradition in Istanbul.



Employees work on a cymbal at a workshop in Istanbul. — **AFP**

Today, the city remains a centre for cymbal production, with several brands using techniques developed more than four centuries ago.

“We are producing 100% handmade cymbals with traditional methods, without using electricity or gas, only coal and wood”, said Mehmet Ozturk of Bosphorus Cymbals, where production can take up to a week.

Most cymbals begin as copper and tin melted into bronze, poured into moulds and cooled into disc-shaped blanks. Workers repeatedly heat the blanks in a furnace and pass them through a rolling mill to compress and spread the metal before tempering it in water.

“Every stage is crucial”, said master cymbalsmith Hasan Seker, 56, who co-founded Bosphorus Cymbals in 1996.

“We use copper and tin and one more ingredient which is secret. Even though it’s in very small quantities, it gives the cymbal a different character in terms of consistency and sound”.

After its raised bell is punched

out and its shape cut, the cymbal undergoes the essential hammering process.

“Not a single blow is random”, Seker said. Variations in each craftsman’s strikes create the darker, more complex tones prized by jazz drummers.

“In a way, he gives the cymbal its soul”, he said.

At Istanbul’s Nardis Jazz Club, drummer Derin Bayhan said he uses locally made cymbals because each has a unique sound.

“Even if you bought two from the same series, the same weight and structure, the two cymbals wouldn’t perfectly match”, he said. “Because it’s handmade, it’s basically an adventure”.

“So you search for one and when you find it, no-one else will have it: that sound is yours”.

Jazz historian Berk Ozler said this individuality explains their lasting appeal.

“Mass production started when Zildjian went to the USA whereas the ones that stayed in Istanbul were handcrafted and still are”, he said. “Jazz musicians chase after that uniqueness so that’s why they are very valuable”. — **AFP**



Drummer Derin Bayhan said he uses locally made cymbals because each has a unique sound. — **AFP**



A worker hammers a cymbal at a workshop in Istanbul. — **AFP**

FEATURES



YERU EBUEN

THE drive back to Muscat from Ras Madrasah is not one most people would associate with surprises. After two days camping along one of Oman's most rugged stretches of coastline, the plan was simple: head north, stop for coffee when needed and reach home before nightfall.

Then someone remembered it was Wednesday. That meant Ibra's women's market would already be in full swing.

With several hours still ahead of us and no pressing reason to hurry, the decision was made almost on impulse. A turn off the highway led us into one of Oman's oldest trading towns, where Wednesday mornings have followed much the same rhythm for generations.

For many travellers, Ibra is little more than a stop on the way to Rimal Al Sharqiya. Yet once a week, it becomes the centre of a tradition that has quietly endured as many others have disappeared.

The streets were already busy when we arrived. Pick-up trucks occupied every available space, while women carrying shopping bags moved purposefully through the narrow lanes. There was activity everywhere, but none of it felt rushed.

The market has changed over the years, but its women-only section remains strictly reserved for women. Its stalls are run by women and visitors are welcome provided they remember that this is a working market before it is a tourist attraction. Cameras stay in bags unless permission is given — a courtesy emphasised by residents and experienced travellers alike.

The two women travelling with us headed inside while the rest of us stayed outside. When they returned, they spoke less about what they had bought than about the people they had met.

Inside, colourful fabrics hung in every direction. Embroidered dresses were stacked beside scarves and woven baskets, while tables overflowed with perfumes, frankincense, spices, jewellery, kitchenware and dates.

A woman selling fabrics invited them to sit. Soon, someone appeared with tiny cups of kahwa, followed by dates. Shopping became secondary as conversations moved between family, life in Muscat and which stall sold the best fabrics that morning.

The bargaining was lively but



WHERE WEDNESDAYS
BELONG TO
WOMEN



never confrontational. Prices moved back and forth with smiles, laughter and the kind of good humour that left both buyer and seller feeling they had done well.

The market felt less like a collection of businesses and more like a neighbourhood that happened to be trading. That is perhaps what visitors miss when they describe Ibra simply as a “women's market”. It is a place to shop, but it has long been something more.

Historically, weekly markets such as Ibra's gave women an opportunity to trade independently, earn an income and meet people from neighbouring villages. They were places where news travelled alongside goods, friendships were maintained and several generations could spend the morning together.

Further south, another weekly tradition unfolds in much the same spirit.

Every Thursday, Sinaw fills with traders arriving from surrounding towns and Bedouin communities. It is best known for its livestock souq, where camels, goats and sheep attract buyers from across the region. Walk a little further, however, and another market reveals itself.

Women sell traditional clothing, jewellery, textiles, woven goods and household items as families move through the narrow passages between stalls. Visitors may arrive expecting a spectacle, but many leave

remembering the conversations instead.

Accounts of the market frequently mention invitations to share kahwa, small gifts from sellers and help choosing fabrics despite a limited shared language. That warmth appears repeatedly, regardless of where the visitor comes from.

At a time when many traditional markets are increasingly shaped by tourism, Ibra and Sinaw continue to serve the communities that built them. Visitors are present, but they are not the reason these markets exist.

By the time we reached Muscat, the boot of the car had been almost full. There were packets of spices, perfumes, colourful fabrics, woven pieces and more dates than anyone remembered buying. Some had been paid for. Others had been pressed into the women's hands with a smile and a gentle refusal to accept money.

Before leaving, several traders encouraged our companions to return another Wednesday — not only to the market, but to visit their homes and see family collections of old silver jewellery, treasured heirlooms and antiques passed from one generation to the next. It was an invitation built on trust rather than tourism.

Looking back, that felt like the real story of Ibra: a place where commerce, hospitality and community still sit comfortably alongside one another. Long after the stalls close for another week, those are the things that remain.